

INITIATING A MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHP MOVEMENT IN A HISTORIC,  
MAINLINE CONGREGATION: AN ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP STUDY AT  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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BY  
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This thesis-project is dedicated to my loving wife and companion in life, Tracie,  
the one whom God in His providence has given me to love and to cherish.  
Thank you for encouraging me to pursue this degree.

If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields,  
how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?

—Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*

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## PREFACE

Little did I know that my journey toward writing this thesis-project would begin years ago in 2003 when I first encountered Reggie McNeal’s “six tough questions for the Church.”<sup>1</sup> McNeal convinced me that the model of church planting I was following at the time was perfectly appropriate for 1952. His hard questioning led (shamed) me to begin a quest to find a better way for mission and ministry in a twenty-first century North American context.

A few years later in 2011 my friend and colleague, Tim Leslie, sent a “white paper” to me and the other pastors on staff at First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina about the apparent failure of our Sunday School program to create community among our covenant partners. Tim’s paper prompted me to think, “Surely, there must be a better way to disciple people and build community in a historic Reformation-heritage church.”

My participation in the implementation phase of First Presbyterian’s 2014-2016 strategic visioning process drove me to consider how we as a congregation might respond to some of the questions our TAG consulting report left unanswered. Once again, I wondered whether there could be a better way of being that Church that might help us respond to the ministry challenges the report raised.

Finally, in the spring of 2015, I experienced a “kairos moment” when I heard a Chinese Church leader named Ying Kai at the Exponential East Conference state, in passing, during his plenary presentation that 2.2 million Chinese had been baptized and discipled using his method called “Training 4 Trainers.”<sup>2</sup> As I listened to a variety of presenters from Western and non-

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1. Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

2. Steve Smith, with Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011).

Western backgrounds, I began to believe that, indeed, there were effective approaches to mission and ministry on the horizon for my North American context. The question that remained was how these could be adapted and applied in the life of a large, historic congregation like First Presbyterian Church.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my friends and colleagues in ministry who aided me in the process of completing this thesis-project. By God's providence, Mike and Sally Breen moved to Greenville and joined First Presbyterian for a short time not knowing that I had already chosen years earlier to introduce their strategy for missional disciple making into the life of our congregation. While they were here, they willingly shared their wisdom and experience with me and so many of us in the church. Their presence at First Presbyterian was and remains a true gift.

Rev. Chad Pullins faithfully coached and walked with me and the other members of our Staff Huddle before, throughout and after the completion of this project. His knowledge and encouragement sustained all of us in ways that are uncalculatable.

My senior supervisors, Dr. Richard Gibbons and Dr. Shelton Sanford, graciously gave me the time and the "space" to conduct and write about this project. I am truly thankful for their generosity and support.

Elder Edith Parks was diligent in lending me her fine eyes for catching the mistakes in my drafts. Thank you, Edith.

For years my colleagues in our Staff Huddle have made me think, laugh and cry about ministry and mission. There are no finer co-laborers in the Kingdom.

Finally, I want to thank the fourteen participants in this project who trusted me to lead them in this new endeavor. Your passion, love and honesty inspired me during each and every Huddle and Missional Community leadership meeting. Thank you for your own willingness to invest in the lives of others. You are all living embodiments of the Apostle Paul's call to pass on what you have seen and heard to those who can equip others (2 Timothy 2:2).

## ABSTRACT

Congregations that have inherited a traditional Reformation and Church Growth ministry culture are finding that calibrating themselves for mission in the West is an increasingly challenging task. This thesis-project contends that pastors who lead mainline-heritage churches must become competent in two areas of ministry beyond the traditional duties of preaching, teaching, pastoral care and program administration. They must become proficient disciple makers and adaptive transformation leaders who can shape the ministry culture of the congregation he or she serves. By equipping his or her covenant partners in this manner, a missional discipleship multiplication movement may result.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### **The Scene**

A few years ago, the leadership team of a Bible study at the church I serve, First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina (hereafter FPC), asked me to come to their class's next meeting and help them understand something they had read in the curriculum guide for their class. The author of the study had raised one of the finer points of predestination and evidently this had caused quite a bit of stir and consternation among the participants. The leaders felt it might be good idea to call in some heavy artillery to blast away the haze of confusion, so they reached out to me – one of the associate pastors of the congregation. I was happy to go.

When I arrived, I saw that the group was made up of about twenty ladies who were all well into retirement age.<sup>1</sup> Once they related to me the specific questions they had, I quickly dispatched their issues. From their body language, I could see that a feeling of ease and delight had returned to the room. Before I left, however, I turned to them and asked, “I’ve helped you all; now can you give me just a moment of your time for something?” “Sure,” they nodded, delighted that they could now assist me in return.

“Let me just ask you all – How many of you have been a faithful part of this Bible study for quite a while now?” All of their hands went up. “OK, how about for, say, ten years?” Once again lifted hands and smiles filled the room. “Great,” I said. “So let me ask you, how many of you grew up in the Church all of your lives and attended Sunday School when you were little

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1. It is normal for a pastor of FPC to be unaware of the wide variety of study groups in the congregation that meet outside of Sunday morning. In a congregation of 2,700 members, these groups are legion. They range from formal to informal and include Women’s “Circle” groups, men’s and women’s Bible studies that gather at all times and days of the week on the church campus, at restaurants and at places of business, community groups that meet as couples in homes, and a ministry called “Radiance” that includes about 400 young women in their 20’s and early 30’s. This last group meets in homes around the region on Wednesday nights.

girls?" "Yes, pastor, absolutely," came the unanimous reply among nods of satisfaction.

"Wonderful, then let me ask you this: With all of these great years of faithful preparation, how many of you believe right now that you could individually disciple another person to maturity in the Christian faith?" A stunned and perplexed silence fell over the group. Nervously, they looked at me and at one another.

On another occasion, when speaking to some men about the need to communicate and demonstrate our faith in Jesus Christ to those in our neighborhoods and workplaces, one gentleman very proudly responded to me that he always welcomed and shook the hand of every person he did not know on Sunday mornings in the church hallways. When I asked, "What about the people who will never walk through our hallways?" he became visibly baffled and allowed the conversation to drift to other matters.<sup>2</sup>

Historic "mainline" churches all across North America are filled with wonderful saints such as these—men and women who have listened to sermons all their lives and who have faithfully attended Sunday School, Bible studies and a variety of classes and programs for decades.<sup>3</sup> With great earnestness, they have raised their families in the Church, contributed their

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2. These stories are representative of a number of conversations I had with different groups at FPC during the Fall and Winter of 2016. In several instances, I asked adult Sunday School participants to raise their hands if they felt ready and equipped to intentionally disciple a follower of Jesus in such a way that their disciple could then disciple other believers? Despite that fact that almost all of these class participants had attended Sunday School for much of their lives, less than five percent of them raised their hands.

3. Historic "mainline," "mainstream" or "ecumenical" churches are those ecclesiastical bodies that emerged from the American Revolution as the dominant Protestant bodies and were highly influential in shaping American religion and culture during the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. These bodies include the Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Congregationalists (now the United Church of Christ), Disciples, American Baptists and Presbyterians. The Presbyterian denominations that are generally considered as mainstream are the three main branches that came into existence in the twentieth century. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) merged in 1958 with the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) to form the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) or the "northern" Presbyterian Church. The UPCUSA and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS), otherwise known as the "southern" Presbyterian Church of which First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina had been a part, reunited in 1983 to become the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or PC(USA). In 2012, First Presbyterian Church left the PC(USA) to become a member congregation of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). Not generally included among mainstream Presbyterians are the more theologically conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), the

time and financial resources and some have even held leadership positions. But when asked whether they feel equipped either to introduce someone to the Christian faith from outside the Church or to disciple a person into a more mature stage of faith, many of them feel sorely inadequate for the task. Given that Jesus' last instruction for his followers was to "go and make disciples," something, somewhere must be amiss.<sup>4</sup>

## The Problem

Over the last thirty years or so, church leaders and observers have come to recognize more and more that calibrating the Church in the West for ministry is a challenging task. Historically, most Christians in the West assumed that the mission field was somewhere beyond the horizon, but now because of changing demographics, including the rising number of religious "nones," North America has become the third largest mission field in the world.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the Church no longer seems accustomed to the world in which it exists. The pace of external change

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Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). This dizzying array of acronyms is sometimes known as "Presbyterian alphabet soup."

4. Matthew 28:19. All scripture references are taken from the 1984 New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

5. "Nones" are those who when asked by the US Census Bureau to indicate their religious affiliation mark "none of the above." Given current trends, it is estimated that by 2030, 46% of American adults will self-identify as religious nones.

"North America has the third largest block of unbelievers in the world only after China and India" (Mark Powers, "America is Now the #1 Mission Field in the World," Going Full Circle Blog, July 15, 2014, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://goingfullcircleblog.wordpress.com/2014/07/15/america-is-now-the-1-mission-field-in-the-world>). The US is becoming an increasingly post-Christian society. This means that younger people are less likely to search for a faith community than their parents did. Churches that rely on "church shoppers" to find them will not be as successful as in the past because there will be fewer and fewer shoppers. The Barna Research Group released these findings in April 2013: "Each generation is more post-Christian than the one that came before it. Only 28 percent of seniors (ages 67+) are considered post-Christian, as compared to 35 percent of Boomers (ages 48 to 66), 40 percent of Busters (aka Gen Xers) (ages 29 to 47) and 48 percent of Mosaics (aka Millennials ages 18 to 28)" (Jeff Schapiro, "America Becoming Increasingly 'Post-Christian,' Research Shows," *Christian Post*, April 15, 2013, accessed March 9, 2021, [www.christianpost.com/news/america-becoming-increasingly-post-christian-research-shows.html](http://www.christianpost.com/news/america-becoming-increasingly-post-christian-research-shows.html)).

is accelerating, and traditional leadership approaches from the past for discipling believers and reaching communities no longer appear to be as effective.

Every measurable indicator of the general congregational health across North America shows a decline in participation, vitality and impact.<sup>6</sup> These trends are most acute among churches like FPC that have inherited a historic, mainline ministry culture.<sup>7</sup> Could it be that these stagnating trends at FPC and the decline among mainline Protestant churches as a whole are at least partially, if not primarily, related to the kinds of vignettes shared above? Stories of long-

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6. For example, David Olson of the American Church Project ([www.theamericanchurch.org](http://www.theamericanchurch.org)) documents that in terms of attendees, traditional, established congregations that are more than 40 years old are in steady and persistent decline and these trends tend to hold true regardless of theology, worship style, denomination or locale. Despite self-reporting surveys that suggest more than 40% of U.S. citizens are active attenders, Olson's research asserts that less than 20% of Americans attend a Christian church on a given weekend. The only growing segments for most denominations are new church plants, mega-churches, or ethnic congregations. Other researchers confirm this decline in attendance and adherence in a variety of studies. For example, see the Hartford Institute for Religious Research study by David Roozen, *American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving*, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>, and the Pew Research Center report, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape," last updated October 17, 2019, accessed March 9, 2021, [www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace](http://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace). The conclusions of Olsen, Roozen and the Pew Research Center leave the vast majority of historic, American Protestant congregations to face an uncertain future.

Along with these findings, a growing number of other researchers are claiming that evangelical churches are steady while only the mainline church is plummeting (See Landon Schnabel and Sean Bock, "The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research," *Sociological Science* 4, no. 28 [November 27, 2017], accessed April 17, 2018, [www.sociologyscience.com/articles-v4-28-686](http://www.sociologyscience.com/articles-v4-28-686)). Also, D. M. Haskell, K.N. Flatt, and S. Burgoyne write, "the theological conservatism of both attendees and clergy emerged as important factors in predicting church growth" ("Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy," *Review of Religious Research* 58 [May 2016]: abstract, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-016-0255-4>). First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina is somewhat difficult to categorize in that it has remained both conservative and evangelical in its theology, yet for the vast portion of its 173-year history it was also associated with a mainline denomination.

7. Aggregate membership losses among mainline Presbyterian denominations began in 1965 and have continued unabated. In 1965 the predecessor denominations that would form the PC(USA) reported a peak membership of 4.25 million members (Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, Louis B. Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 67). At the time of their merger in 1983, the UPCUSA and PCUS had a combined membership of 3,121,238. In 2018, the PC(USA) reported 1,352,678 active members (Rick Jones, "PC(USA) Membership Decline has Slowed," Office of the General Assembly, April 23, 2019, accessed May 13, 2020, [www.pcusa.org/news/2019/4/23/pcusa-membership-decline-has-slowed](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2019/4/23/pcusa-membership-decline-has-slowed)). These figures represent a 68% decrease in active membership from 1965 to 2018. From 1965 to 2018 the population of the United States increased from 199,733,676 to 327,096,265 (Worldometer, "United States Population Live," accessed May 13, 2020, [www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population](http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population)). This means that the percentage of mainline Presbyterians in the American population has decreased during that time period from 2.1% to 0.4%. The decline is so severe that some scholars now popularly call mainline Protestantism "oldline."

time Christian believers who are struggling in a changing context with how to reach, connect with and disciple those who are in and beyond the walls of the church.

Numerous theories have been proposed to explain this decline among mainstream Protestant congregations in North America.<sup>8</sup> Some see external cultural forces at work such as a declining birth rate, a shift toward greater individual autonomy and freedom from institutional restraints, and the secularizing effects of industrialization, urbanization and the spread of mass education.<sup>9</sup> Others attribute the decline to internal factors within these congregations including the churches' indifference to the sufferings and struggles of the ethnic minorities, the poor and other marginalized groups.<sup>10</sup> Conservative and mainline observers have drawn attention to the liberalization of behavior and doctrine in these denominations.<sup>11</sup>

For example, in their 1993 article "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," mainstream Presbyterian scholars Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge and Donald A. Luidens

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8. For an extensive study of this decline by mainstream Presbyterian scholars, see Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks, eds., *The Mainline Protestant "Decline": The Presbyterian Pattern* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). This book, along with *The Re-Forming Tradition*, is part of a seven-volume series entitled "The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth Century Experience." This series on the history and dynamics of American mainline Presbyterianism forms a case study, funded by the Lilly Endowment, of the patterns of religious and cultural change among mainstream Protestantism in the United States. Over sixty researchers contributed to the study. Tellingly, another volume in the series, *The Diversity of Discipleship: The Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Christian Witness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) includes thirteen chapters on such topics as church planting, denominational publications, mass media, ecumenism, pluralism, racial policy and ethnic assimilation, but not a single chapter is devoted to past or current strategies for how to make or form individual followers of Jesus.

9. For example, see Robert Wuthnow, "The Restructuring of American Presbyterianism: Turmoil in One Denomination," and Edward W. Farley, "The Presbyterian Heritage as Modernism: Reaffirming a Forgotten Past in Hard Times" in Milton J. Coulter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks, *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 27-66.

10. See, for example, Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition*, 187-330.

11. For a non-conservative example, see the controversial work of Dean M. Kelley who attributed the growth of conservative churches to doctrinal and behavioral strictness. He states, "Those who are serious about their faith: 1. Do not confuse it with other beliefs/loyalties/practices, or mingle them together indiscriminately, or pretend they are alike, of equal merit, or mutually compatible if they are not. 2. Make high demands of those admitted to the organization...and do not include or allow to continue within it those who are not fully committed to it. 3. Do not consent to, encourage, or indulge any violations of its standards or belief or behavior by its professed adherents" (*Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a new Preface* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996], 121).

identify what they call “lay liberalism” as the chief contributor to this downward trend in adherence.<sup>12</sup> Lay liberalism embraces the postmodern notion that Christianity is not the only religion with a valid claim to truth. Though lay liberals may *prefer* Christianity, the authors note these church members are “hard put to offer theological reasons why anyone should remain a Presbyterian, or even a Christian.... They do not care what theological views their children embrace or whether they attend church when they grow up, but they do want them to become ‘good people.’”<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Hoge and Luidens say that lay liberalism “does not inspire the kind of conviction that creates strong religious communities” and they bemoan the fact these church members “rarely discuss religious matters even with their own family and friends.”<sup>14</sup>

The authors are mildly encouraged by the PC(USA)’s new emphasis on new church development in the 1990s, but they are dubious about whether these new church plants will actually attract new adherents.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the article, the authors turn to what they see as the heart of the issue: “If the mainline churches want to regain their vitality, their first step must be to address theological issues head-on. They must listen to the voices of lay liberals and provide compelling answers to the question, ‘What’s so special about Christianity?’”<sup>16</sup>

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12. Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” *First Things* [March 1993], accessed May 14, 2020, [www.firstthings.com/article/1993/03/mainline-churches-the-real-reason-for-decline](http://www.firstthings.com/article/1993/03/mainline-churches-the-real-reason-for-decline). In the article, the authors assert that adherence to orthodox Christian belief is the strongest determiner of whether a person will remain an active participant in the Christian faith.

13. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches.”

14. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches.”

15. “If these new programs (churches) are well-planned and well-executed the membership loss may be slowed or even reversed for a time. The largest category of likely recruits are ‘religious’ baby boomers who dropped out of a mainline church when they were young but who are now married and have children at home.... But our data suggests that the vast majority of such prospects are lay liberals and few are likely, at least under present circumstances, to form deep commitments to the Christian faith or to the life of their new parishes” (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches”). This researcher was a part of that new church development movement in the PC(USA) planting two churches between 1995-2008.

16. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches.”

Though Johnson, Hoge and Luidens assert the decline of mainstream Protestantism may be attributable to the purveyance of lay liberalism, this does not seem to be a critical factor among the staff, leadership and a vast majority of the members at FPC. In fact, it was in great part their active rejection of this theological perspective that led the “covenant partners” of the congregation to vote by 96.4% in 2012 to leave the mainline PC(USA) and join a new Reformed denomination, the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).<sup>17</sup> FPC is not confused about “what’s so special about Christianity.”

Instead, the authors point their readers toward a deeper malady that appears to have more of an impact in FPC’s congregational life:

The underlying problem of the mainline churches cannot be solved by new programs and church development alone. That problem is the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life. Somehow, in the course of the past century, *these churches lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith and what it requires to a succession of younger cohorts in such a way as to command their allegiance.*<sup>18</sup>

The authors highlight a phenomenon that I believe the short stories at the beginning of this thesis-project illustrate. The issue centers around a word many mainline Presbyterian scholars appear either too shy to use or is just simply not a part of their customary vocabulary. The term is “discipleship,” and the problem, to put it succinctly, is this: *in the face of a changing cultural context, congregations and leaders from the mainline Presbyterian heritage are*

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17. The ECO has a defined set of Essential Tenets that state in part: “In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God” (“ECO Constitution: Essential Tenets, Polity, and Rules of Discipline 2018,” accessed March 9, 2021, [https://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/eco\\_constitution\\_2018.pdf](https://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/eco_constitution_2018.pdf)). Individual members of ECO congregations are called “covenant partners.”

18. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches,” emphasis mine.

*struggling with how to make disciples in a way that generates “spiritual conviction...a “vigorous communal life,” and a lifestyle of missional engagement.*<sup>19</sup>

Again, FPC does not seem to lack the theological motivation to multiply disciples and connect with its neighbors due to the influence of lay liberalism. Every sermon and Sunday school lesson includes a clear and compelling presentation of the truths of the Christian faith and the saving power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. By all accounts, FPC’s covenant partners believe that Jesus Christ matters above all else and that every person needs him. Rather, there are two other factors *not* noted by Johnson, Hoge and Luidens that appear to weigh more heavily on this congregation’s inability to multiply disciples who can connect with their neighbors: a traditional model of pastoral leadership inherited from its Reformed ecclesiastical tradition that is insufficiently grounded within a biblical framework and an “attributional” model of church ministry that has been prevalent among North American evangelical congregations for the last 40 years but is contextually inadequate for impacting Western culture.<sup>20</sup> These two factors are further exacerbated by another pervasive element of North American culture: consumerism.

In light of all these dynamics, I contend that the decline of mainline churches in North America is most attributable to their inability to perform the most basic calling of the Christian faith – that of discipling others in a way that creates compelling belief and infectious community. To put it another way, the problem is this: *The approach to ministry and mission that most*

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19. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, “Mainline Churches.”

20. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens explore neither the basic assumptions of the traditional Reformed pastor/lay ecclesiastical model for disciple-making nor the attributional model of ministry as a source of the decline among mainline Presbyterians. In fact, one may note the “attributional” language they use in the article when describing the ministry of an effective church plant: “An appealing minister, a warm but low-keyed invitation to participate, a friendly and informal atmosphere, good childcare and preschool facilities, attractive programs for young people and adults, and the presence of other families like themselves may persuade some of them to go back to church” (“Mainline Churches”). Notice the emphasis upon an “appealing minister” and “attractive programs” as reasons for unchurched/de-churched people to come into the fold. Note also the underlying hope that potential adherents will come to the church’s location. There is no discussion within the article about how believers might be equipped to embody and communicate their faith within the networks of their relationships where they live, work and recreate. The attributional model of ministry will be defined and discussed more fully in this thesis-project.

*mainline Protestant churches employ does not adequately prepare its covenant partners to multiply other disciples nor does this model equip and inspire them to reach out with the Gospel into their networks of relationships outside of the walls of the church.* In short, we are not producing missional disciples who can make other missional disciples. As a result, these congregations are ill-equipped to minister in this current cultural context and unwitting contributors to the decline in impact and health of the Church in North America.

### **The Research Question**

Current demographic and cultural trends make it vital that the Church in North America transition from the unsustainable path it has historically taken to a new one that is more biblically faithful, contextually appropriate and measurably fruitful. Thankfully, for the last several decades, a variety of missional authors, conference leaders and practitioners have been calling for and equipping multiplication movements of missional disciples in North America as a solution to the Church's decline.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, almost all of the congregations that are hearing this call are church plants and non-mainline churches, and though these churches may have a number of external and internal challenges to overcome, they do not appear to be as encumbered in the same way by some of the centuries-long, established patterns of mission and leadership that are the products of the vanishing, Christendom ministry model.

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21. I will draw attention to a number of these missional authors, conference leaders and practitioners in this thesis. Since its inception in 2011, the Exponential Conference has become a preeminent venue for many of these authors and practitioners to offer church multiplication training in North America. The Exponential organization holds two major conferences per year (5,000 attendees at each event) along with smaller regional meetings. These conferences focus particularly on equipping church planters, but attendees interested in renewing existing congregations can benefit from the over 150 workshops which cover such topics as discipleship, leadership development and multi-ethnic ministry. For more information see <https://exponential.org>. Frequent plenary and workshop speakers at these conferences include Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, Brad Brisco, Hugh Halter, Bobby Harrington, Andy Stanley, Francis Chan and Alex Absalom.

Those who continue to maintain a mainline ministry tradition will almost certainly face a far deeper struggle with how to embrace some of these seemingly new strategies for discipleship and mission in this season in the West. Confusion may abound over the efficacy of traditional models of disciple making and at what pace these patterns should be transformed or abandoned. Leaders may ask who or what is at fault for this lack of preparation for the missional disciple-making task. Are individual covenant partners culpable by virtue of a lack of commitment, or is it that their church culture expects too little of them and leads them to believe that serious discipling should be left to religious professionals on staff?

Pastors especially might struggle with what skills and internal strength of character they should cultivate in order for the Church of Jesus Christ to flourish during these changing times. They may also wonder whether preaching, teaching, pastoral care and administration as they are traditionally conceived are adequate for leading others into Christian maturity or whether there is another way of leading the congregation that might prove more fruitful and effective in equipping believers to replicate other disciples.

In order to respond to this myriad of challenges, *this thesis-project will explore how to initiate a missional discipleship multiplication movement within the life of First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina.* It is my sense that by answering this research question, I will be able to equip FPC to address some of the weaknesses in its ministry, thereby enhancing its ability to faithfully impact our community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is my hope, as well, that as a result of this research, I may also be able to offer some tentative solutions to the decline among mainline Protestants in North America.

## **The Hypothesis**

In this thesis-project, I will address the research question from the perspective of an associate pastor who occupies a “third chair” leadership position within the staff structure of the church. My thesis asserts that in order to initiate ministry culture transformation within the life of FPC, an associate pastor should embody a threefold equipping approach based upon Ephesians 4:11-12. First, he or she must lay the foundations for a biblically grounded ecclesiology that is contextually appropriate for FPC at this time in her history. Second, the pastor should train covenant partners to lead a disciple-making multiplication movement. This preparation will include clarifying the roles and relationships between pastors and congregants in this movement. Third, in order to initiate the transformation of the church from a ministry delivery culture to a missional discipleship equipping culture, a pastor can begin the process of realigning the ministry of the church toward a missional discipleship culture by leading a small experimental disciple-making learning group on the organizational periphery of the congregation where the pastor is able to model the activity, lifestyle and posture of a missional disciple-maker. By embracing this threefold catalytic posture, an associate pastor can become an adaptive change agent and the chief environmental architect of a lay-centered, missional discipleship movement within the life of a historic congregation like FPC that will extend into the neighborhoods of a city that surround it.

In order to test whether this hypothesis may hold some promise for addressing a variety of the weaknesses in FPC’s ministry, I led the design, implementation and analysis of an initial experiment in missional disciple making. I engaged in this experiment as both the leader and as a participant in this investigation, experiencing along with the other participants the same training and assessments that they completed.

It is beyond the time frame and scope of this project to determine whether the fruits of this experiment will indeed grow into a mature missional discipleship movement in the life of FPC. However, it may be observable whether or not the initial implantation of this movement takes some root in the culture of the congregation. Additionally, there may be some noticeable indications of what will be necessary to sustain this movement in the future.

### **An Overview**

The rest of this chapter will include information related to the external and internal ministry context of the congregation. The reader will see that FPC is uniquely located in a fast-growing, downtown area of a small city in the southeastern United States. Though its external context is vibrant and the church has numerous strengths, there are a number of internal forces within the congregation that are keeping it from flourishing in ways that it might. Chief among these dynamics is an attractional philosophy of ministry wedded to a consumerist mindset. It appears that FPC, like many traditional churches with a Reformed mainline ecclesiology, could benefit from a discipleship movement that places disciple making, community building and missional engagement firmly into the hands of its covenant partners.

In chapter two I will defend my thesis by exploring three important historical, biblical and theological shifts that are taking place within Western ecclesiology. At the end of this chapter, I will contend that these changes can actually serve to place the Church on a much firmer foundation from which to do mission and ministry.

The first shift will summarize contemporary discussions related to the Trinity with specific reference to how this conversation has served to highlight the eschatological sending

nature of the Church. In this shift, I will also explore the phrase “incarnational posture” as it relates to the call of Jesus upon disciples to live missionally.

Maintaining that one’s Doctrine of God and Christology should inform one’s understanding of discipleship, I will guide the reader through a second shift concerning a changing model of discipleship that moves from a classroom focus with information transfer at its center to one that is more missional and transformational in character. Here, I will examine the Greek terms *mathetes* (“disciple”), noting especially the biblical model of how disciples are formed, and *katartismos* (“equip”) which speaks to the potential role of leaders including pastors in the disciple-making process. My research will show that the historic Reformed emphasis on information transfer as a primary strategy for disciple making is neither consistent with the biblical and Ante-Nicene Church model nor effective in our current cultural context.

The third and final shift in chapter two will survey changes in the relationship between Western culture and the Church. Given that the main function of the Church is to make disciples, all forms of Church life should be directed toward that end. As a part of this section, I will discuss the contrast between the “attributional” and the “missional” models for ministry and mission, defining both of these terms. I will also explore the meaning of the word *oikos* (“household”) and how these social units were and could be used again as the context for discipleship formation and missional engagement. Recovering biblical *oikos* is an antidote for consumerism.

In my summary of chapter two, I will highlight a number of potential issues FPC might face while experiencing a process of transformation as well as a variety of biblical and theological resources a pastoral change agent might draw upon in order to help the congregation move forward. These resources are already firmly ensconced in the Reformed and evangelical

faith of the congregation. Finally, I will offer working definitions of the phrases “missional discipleship,” “missional church” and “missional discipleship multiplication movement.”

In chapter three I will further extend my argument by offering a literature review of a variety of missional church leadership authors. In order to give the reader a larger picture of the pastoral leadership model FPC has inherited, I will place these missional writers in conversation with a prominent proponent of the traditional Reformation model of ecclesiology and pastoral leadership. By this juxtaposition, I hope to offer the reader a full sense of the challenges the congregation and particularly the pastors may face as they move together through a process of transformation.

The literature review is organized around the threefold range of meaning of the NT term *katartismos* (“equip”) that I reference in chapter two. In the first section of the review, I will contend for a balanced and biblical ecclesiology that includes mid-sized “missional communities” as a place where disciples are shown how to embody the spiritual DNA of Jesus in community. Using the arguments of a number of these missional church authors, I will further contend that these missional communities can be one of the transformational elements in the life of a historic church that will initiate a viral, self-replicating missional discipleship movement in the congregation and beyond.

The second section of the literature review will feature a number of authors who propose a range of approaches toward pastoral leadership. Here, the reader will note a recovery of a model of pastoral leadership based upon Ephesians 4:11-12 in which the pastor serves as a specialized trainer in missional discipleship formation. Three variant training approaches will be included in this section of the review so that the reader can assess which one may best address the needs of his or her own particular ministry context.

The third and final section of the literature review will offer a number of transformational ideas and strategies a pastor can employ as he or she leads the congregation they serve into greater alignment with Christ’s vision for the Church and, potentially, the congregation’s own mission and strategy statements. These transformational elements will be considered in light of some of the unique paradoxes that “second” or “third chair” associate pastors may face while leading a transformational process.

Chapter four details my project design. In order to test my hypothesis, I decided to focus on the smallest, most granular unit of measurement – the individual follower of Jesus. I selected fourteen covenant partners from the congregation and led them through a nine-month, missional discipleship equipping process. Using an online assessment survey provided by my denomination and a pair of open-ended questions at the beginning and end of the experiment, I sought to measure changes in behavior, skills, competency and knowledge in relation to personal discipleship, disciple making and missional engagement.

Chapter five describes the outcomes of the project, including a description, analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the online assessment and questions posed to the participants. I note in particular what I and the other participants learned from this experiment and how they and I changed and to what degree. I will include other observations about the change process from a macro-congregational level as well.

Before conducting the exercise, I postulated that engaging in a missional discipleship equipping process would not only serve as an effective initial introduction for a disciple multiplication movement into the life of FPC but that it would also enhance the disciple-making and community-building capacity of the participants and myself. The data collected seems to confirm my hypothesis that a pastor’s own approach to disciple making can have a central

impact on the culture of a congregation and the way it responds to its role in the missional discipleship task. Further, the results of this experiment also indicate that introducing a missional discipleship movement into the life of a congregation may be a positive way to begin to address the decline of historic, mainline churches in North America.

### **External Ministry Context: The Community**

FPC is located in a downtown area that is recognized nationally as one of the most vibrant, attractive and growing cities in America.<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the downtown area of Greenville, South Carolina drifted into a steep economic decline and a number of churches began to relocate to the suburbs. Despite these trends, leaders at FPC made the decision not to leave their location one block from Main Street. In the early 1990s, city leaders began to redevelop the downtown area starting along Main Street, and, as a result, FPC now actually benefits from its thriving location in a way that many other downtown churches in America do not.<sup>23</sup>

Most, though not all, of the larger congregations in the downtown area have benefited from these development trends. FPC has the continued potential to gain from this growth and has experienced a steady stream of new members from local church membership transfers and people who are relocating to the area.

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22. Since its resurgence, Greenville has received a number of awards and media mentions including from the American Planning Association, Travel and Leisure, The New York Times, Main Street America, Esquire, The Atlantic, Lonely Planet, The League of American Bicyclists, USA Today and the PBS News Hour (“Downtown Reborn,” City of Greenville, South Carolina, accessed April 28, 2018, <https://grvlsc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=d08f31d4489d475c8115ac7ccbac25b>).

23. For more information about the demographic growth and dynamism of Greenville, see Appendix A.

However, not all congregations have benefited from these growth trends, as evidenced by the downtown churches that have closed their doors in the last five years.<sup>24</sup> With the rise in population in Greenville, one would anticipate that FPC's worship attendance and membership would also grow significantly. However, worship attendance has only increased by 8.75% over the last twenty-two years.<sup>25</sup> Membership actually declined from 4,373 in 2001 to 2,763 in 2019. This is a net loss of 1,610 members or 36.9%. The decrease in membership occurred despite the fact the church received 2,912 new covenant partners during that same time period. This makes the resultant gross loss in adult covenant partners 4,522 for that time frame.<sup>26</sup> These figures indicate a serious "back door" phenomenon which must be addressed.<sup>27</sup> Author and consultant Kevin Ford notes that a high rate of membership turnover is endemic among attractional churches.<sup>28</sup> Could part of the solution be a new approach to reaching, connecting with, and discipling those who are in and beyond the walls of the church?

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24. Before its building was demolished in 2016 for a 271-unit luxury apartment complex, Pendleton Street Baptist Church in the West End area of downtown was one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. Having sold the property it was no longer able to maintain, a small remnant of its membership now worships at a local hotel. Third Presbyterian Church located just northwest of downtown is now defunct.

25. FPC's *Strategic Plan: 2004-2008* indicates that in 2003 the church averaged 1,400 in worship attendance. The plan notes that figure was the same in 1998. The average total weekly attendance for all Sunday services at FPC is now approximately 1,600.

26. This data comes from the annual statistical reports in the sessional records of the church. Only 14% (632) of these losses were due to death. It impossible to quantify how much of this membership loss was due to employment transfer and how many of these former members still reside in the community.

27. Although the covenant partners of the church are not generally cognizant of these trends, the senior leadership is well-aware that the congregation has stagnated in terms of attendance and declined in membership growth: "FPC has membership turnover which we believe is due to a lack of integration into the community life of the church. Therefore, we realize that strategies need to be developed to ensure that FPC becomes a secure spiritual home for our members where they are effectively assimilated into the life of the church and are being equipped for ministry and service in our church and throughout our community and the world" (From the March 20, 2018 *Report to the Strategic Planning Committee: Staff Reorganization at First Presbyterian Church* by Dr. Shelton Sanford, Executive Director. Excerpts of this report may be found in Appendix B).

28. Ford uses Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona as a case study for understanding the dynamics of the consumer church: "Although hundreds of people were flocking through the many front doors of CCOJ, almost as many were leaving through a large back door.... Seekers were not being transformed into

## **Internal Ministry Context: The Congregation**

### Traditional Models for Discipleship, Mission and Church Growth

Since its founding in 1848, FPC has relied upon the traditional Sunday School classroom model and the Sunday morning sermon as its primary delivery systems for making disciples.<sup>29</sup> In 1999 the church also incorporated a Wednesday evening series called “Wednesday Advantage” that includes the senior pastor’s Bible study and a variety of elective classes which cover everything from marriage and parenting to Christian worldview and studies on books of the Bible. This overall approach to discipleship is very much consistent with the historic Presbyterian commitment to “the life of the mind in the service of God.”<sup>30</sup> The church’s educational strategy is overwhelmingly focused on the dissemination of information where a skilled presenter transfers information to the hearers. This approach to discipleship, based on the Enlightenment understanding that the human problem is ignorance, includes the assumption that when a person encounters new information in the form of biblical truth, their lives will change, and the discipleship process will progress. Though there are a great variety of informal small groups throughout the congregation, FPC never officially embraced the small group movement that has been so prevalent in the North American evangelical Church since the 1980s.

Participation in “mission” at FPC has traditionally been understood as something for which one might donate money in order to support career missionaries or as an event or project for which one might volunteer. The church maintains an almost \$1 million missions budget through its Missions Committee, and it offers a great range of projects and volunteer

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disciples” (*Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to the Great* [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997], 33).

29. Nineteen adult Sunday School classes meet each Sunday morning. There are classes for senior high, middle school and graded elementary school children as well.

30. John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 80-82.

opportunities during the year in tandem with regional mission agencies. A burgeoning short-term missions ministry to the Dominican Republic garners much enthusiasm among adults and youth alike.

FPC's music ministry centers around three Sunday morning worship services. The two traditional services in the sanctuary regularly feature a 70-person choir and a small orchestra accompanied by piano and an impressive pipe organ. A number of the choir members and orchestral instrumentalists are paid music students and professional musicians from around the community. A contemporary service which meets in the church Fellowship Hall offers a more relaxed atmosphere with a light rock vibe and music similar to that which can be heard on Christian radio. Christmas Eve averages 3,500 in attendance over five services and Easter morning sees around 3,000 worshippers over four services.

In the Spring of 2019, the leadership of the congregation launched a \$33 million capital campaign called “Transforming the Heart of the City” in order to expand and redevelop its downtown facilities. This improvement includes plans for a new 1,100 seat Worship and Arts Center that will allow the contemporary service to be relocated from the Fellowship Hall. The plans also feature a centrally located main entrance, gathering space, a new gymnasium, additional adult and children’s classrooms, new youth facilities and a secure, yet accessible, area for the church’s children’s ministry.

The vision behind the building campaign is to offer excellent facilities in the midst of the growing city of Greenville that will allow the congregation to expand its ministry and attract new adherents. Given its location in the American South – one of the last central vestiges of Christendom in North America – there is a strong sense that people in the community will be attracted to its campus both by its well-designed appearance and by the vast array of quality

programs the church offers. In light of this anticipated increase in attendance, I have contended with the leadership of the congregation that unless the church focuses an equal amount of energy on equipping itself for ministry and mission, both to those in our neighborhoods and those who might come to our campus, we will only exacerbate the back door phenomenon the church has been experiencing for at least the last two decades.

### TAG Analysis

Beginning in 2012, FPC engaged the TAG Consulting firm, led by Kevin Ford, in a vision planning process. In the Spring of 2014, TAG reported their findings to the church in their *Discovery Report*.<sup>31</sup> The report relates a variety of strengths and weaknesses in the ministry of the church. Strengths include worship, staff effectiveness and a high and consistent belief in the authoritative Word of God.<sup>32</sup> The report detects weaknesses in the areas of relationships, reaching younger adults, staff dependence and connecting covenant partners to meaningful

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31. The report, entitled *TAG Discovery Report to First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC, May 2014*, included their findings based upon a variety of data collection methods and sources including advance documentation (membership trends, financial trends, demographic information, church history, issues identified by the pastors, and ministry information); their *Transforming Church Index* or *TCI* (a congregational survey that compares the church to national norms); focus groups and/or interviews with various leaders in the church (staff, long-term members, parents with young children, officers, new members, empty nesters, younger adults); a demographic study of the local community; and their “Prevailing Talents” staff assessment.

32. Scores from the TCI related to worship (percentages represent “yes” responses): I feel inspired by our church’s worship services – 86%; Our minister’s sermons draw people to this church – 77%; I’m growing deeper in my relationship with God through our services – 74%; I can enthusiastically recommend our worship service to friends outside the church – 83% (*Discovery Report*, 10). TCI scores concerning staff effectiveness: New information is effectively communicated to a large number of church members – 90%; Our pastors and leaders do an excellent job of communicating expectations to members – 92%; This church makes effective use of various communication methods (bulletins, newsletters, telephone, e-mail) – 76%; Our church effectively meets goals (deadlines, results and budgets) – 89% (*Discovery Report*, 12). The report indicated that, “It is clear that there is a significant theological alignment within the church community. This is a strong foundation from which the church can launch to accomplish mission” (*Discovery Report*, 9).

ministry.<sup>33</sup> Though the congregation has made great strides over the last ten years in terms of community involvement, the report notes that, “Only a small percentage [of respondents] speculated that the surrounding community would know the church for its generosity and community engagement. While the church’s work at Hollis Academy is to be commended, most felt the church was known primarily as wealthy, white, powerful and very traditional/conservative.”<sup>34</sup>

TAG’s analysis indicates that the central issue facing FPC is one which plagues most congregations in North America: consumerism. In his book *Transforming Church*, Kevin Ford says consumerism is “the idea that personal happiness is equated with acquiring and consuming products – usually alone. We choose our ‘community’ based on our ‘consumption.’ When our individual tastes and desires change, so do our friends.”<sup>35</sup> The opposite is community.

Ford asserts that when a congregation designs its ministry strategy around attracting persons to its campus by offering excellent religious products and programs, the long-term results are predictable: failure. He points to two inherent flaws in this ministry strategy. “First, consumers resist change. You can lure them in, but a consumer-oriented strategy will fail to transform them. Second, the consumer is never satisfied. Rather than being transformed into a life of sacrifice and service, the consumer will demand more and more of others.”<sup>36</sup>

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33. From the TCI, scores regarding relationships: My church is warm – 32%; My church is family – 46%; My church is loving – 24%; My church is relational – 45%; My church is friendly – 26% (*Discovery Report*, 11, 13-15).

34. *Discovery Report*, 13. Hollis Academy is an underserved, Title 1 public elementary school located southwest of the FPC campus in one of the most economically depressed areas of the city. Ten years ago, FPC “adopted” the school and currently around 200 FPC members serve the school as tutors, room parents, reading mentors, etc. In 2019 the South Carolina School Boards Association named FPC their 2019 “Champion for Public Education” award winner.

35. Ford, *Transforming Church*, 30.

36. Ford, *Transforming Church*, 41

Ford quotes Walt Kallestad, the former pastor of the mega-church Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona, as someone who has witnessed the results of this insatiable trend:

What we became was a dispenser of religious goods and services where people came to get instead of a missions station where people are launched to give.... By creating excellent spiritual goods, we believed we could eventually change the consumer mind-set and transition people into ministry, but what we found is that the transition rarely occurred because we were formed to neglect the very process along which the transformation takes place – loving and healthy relationships in the community of God.<sup>37</sup>

As with Community Church of Joy, the key transformational question TAG asks FPC to consider is whether the church will be an “interest-based” or “mission-based” organization.<sup>38</sup>

The report notes,

Focus group attendees appreciated many excellent and worthy aspects of the church’s ministry – from the ministry to children and the high quality of biblical teaching throughout the ministries of the church.... However, all of these programs are experienced more by members than any outsiders. Additionally, *those commenting primarily spoke about being on the receiving end of these quality ministries.*<sup>39</sup>

In other words, a majority of the congregants see themselves as consumers rather than as producers. The report continues, urging FPC to a mission beyond itself:

*If FPC’s members do not thrive on a mission that is external in nature, then the current path is simply unsustainable.* There is a subtle and destructive process at work in a consumer-oriented church (even if what is being consumed is spiritual). Without knowing it the church that operates as a provider of spiritual products sets in motion an endless cycle of production that, in the end, cannot be sustained.<sup>40</sup>

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37. Ford, *Transforming Church*, 40.

38. In an interest-based organization (like a club), the members gather around a common interest, pay dues, and are the main beneficiaries. Mission-based organizations (like World Vision and Habitat) exist for the benefit of non-members. Members are missionaries who serve the beneficiaries. The report notes, “the American church has largely functioned as an interest-based organization. This worked when church itself was a common interest. But in an increasingly post-Christian culture, the interest-based church will eventually become irrelevant.” (*Discovery Report*, 19).

39. *Discovery Report*, 20, emphasis mine.

40. *Discovery Report*, 20, emphasis mine.

In the report, key lay leaders, congregants and staff alike are asked to consider their unconscious roles in creating an interest-based, consumer culture:

The fear of losing membership triggers the hiring of more staff to keep programs and services at an acceptable level. And an increasingly post-Christian culture is less likely to replace those consumers with others who share a common interest in “church.” And the cycle continues.... *Staff members should generally be hired to support and equip members in their ministry.* It seems most members prefer hiring staff to do the ministry. But the staff also plays a role in this system. They don’t want to make people unhappy. After all, this is their livelihood. So the whole consumer-driven system is designed to resist change.<sup>41</sup>

Within their attempt to draw a contrast between the attractional and missional models of ministry, the authors of the TAG report articulate a radical, macro-strategy shift that will allow FPC to impact its ministry area more effectively. This alternative approach is community-centric and every-member-focused rather than campus centric and staff dependent:

Notice the “going out” aspect as opposed to calling the community to “come and see how great we are.” Notice the distinction between the church leadership/staff and the membership. *The challenge in the future for the people of FPC will be to go into the local neighborhoods and make disciples of people who do not yet know the Lord. This seems to be your primary mission field.* This will likely require a shift in balance from a consumer-driven (attractional, serving those already “here” or those theologically similar to us) to a local community model (actively missional). This shift will substantially impact the allocation of resources, including time and money.<sup>42</sup>

The report concludes its executive summary once again with a call for staff to become equippers of ministry and for covenant partners to become the primary deliverers of ministry: “Here’s the key: the members in a mission-based organization are no longer the primary beneficiaries of the organization’s services, but instead the primary means by which the

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41. *Discovery Report*, 21, emphasis mine.

42. *Discovery Report*, 21, emphasis mine.

organization accomplishes its mission! And your own backyard is the most logical place for this to occur.”<sup>43</sup>

The TAG report successfully identifies a number of the important challenges FPC faces. The first is a congregational culture in which members unconsciously act as consumers, and pastors and key lay leaders are hired and chosen to gladly deliver ministry to them – a classic case of institutional co-dependency. The second finding is an over reliance upon an attractional model of ministry that is decidedly tilted toward attracting, caring for, and keeping membership prospects on the church’s campus through a variety of worship services and programs without an equal emphasis on equipping and strategically deploying FPC’s members back into their neighborhoods and networks of relationships for mission and disciple making. At times the report feels generic, displaying a “cut and paste” quality that makes it appear this report has been redacted from TAG reports to other congregations, but this simply highlights the fact that the issues it raises are ubiquitous among the vast majority of large mainline churches in North America. The report truly gets to the heart of the issues at FPC.

On the other hand, there are, from my perspective, at least two major weaknesses in the report. The first centers around the fact that though it adroitly points out many of the key issues at hand, the report nevertheless seems to leave the reader with only a few broad and difficult-to-attain solutions to the challenges it highlights: staff and key leaders should serve primarily as equippers rather than as deliverers of ministry, and members should concentrate on a mission that is more externally focused – one that centers on making new disciples in the local neighborhoods in which they live. These solutions are so overwhelmingly discontinuous with the traditional patterns of ministry and mission in the congregation that it would have been helpful

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43. *Discovery Report*, 23.

for the authors of the report to point the leadership of the church toward some concrete ideas and outside resources for how to affect these transitions.<sup>44</sup>

Because these far-reaching, adaptive solutions were so mystifying, to a significant degree the leadership of the church overlooked the heart of the report's critique concerning consumerism and the relationship between laity and staff and proceeded to interpret TAG's suggestions through something with which they did have experience: an attractional ministry rubric. The result is a reference pamphlet called the *Playbook*.<sup>45</sup> Left to itself, the congregation resorted to "brainstorming" its way forward. The result was a collection of a few good ideas, some "pet projects" and a large number of variants on the same kinds of things the congregation had done in the past.

Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Mart Lensky call this last set of ideas "technical solutions."<sup>46</sup> The best of these ideas were collected into another small pamphlet: *2016 Strategic Plan: Imperatives & Initiatives* where strategic initiatives related to missional living and equipping covenant partners for ministry in the community are relegated to the "Impact" section.<sup>47</sup> The document recommends classes to bring the congregation forward in its thinking on

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44. It is not quite clear why the consulting process with TAG came to an end. It may be that either church leaders became weary of the process and decided to terminate the relationship at a natural breaking point or TAG believed their services were no longer needed once they produced their report. Regardless of why, FPC has been left to carrying out the implementation phase by itself.

45. In response to the TAG Report, the leadership of FPC produced the *First Presbyterian Church Playbook: Strategic Plan 2016*. The intent of this concise reference tool is to make the vision, mission and values of the church accessible to leaders as they execute the new strategy. The central actionable portion of the *Playbook* is made up of a four-part, diamond-shaped rubric labeled: Worship, Cultivate, Impact and Fortify with worship at the top of the diamond.

46. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Lensky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 19. I will explain the topic of "technical solutions" in chapter three of this thesis-project.

47. Examples of good ideas are: "Equip and enable our members to be ministers and missionaries, not consumers, by cultivating a mindset and culture of missional living" and, "Equip members to be missionaries in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and leisure engagements" (*2016 Strategic Plan: Imperatives & Initiatives*, First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC, 2016).

these topics. At no point is staff asked to lead by example with missional living. The term “discipleship” is not used either in the *Playbook* or in the *Imperatives & Initiatives*.

In short, the TAG report left the leadership of the congregation to struggle with the question of “how?” How will members of the congregation shift from consumers to producers of mission and ministry? How do staff and key leaders transform themselves from acting as the primary deliverers of ministry to equippers for ministry? How can FPC move from a “come to us” mentality to a mindset that is community-centric and excited about engaging non-believers on their turf?<sup>48</sup> How can the church train its members to make disciples in way that is significant, relational, connective and meaningful to younger populations who are outside the church? And, finally, how can the congregation prepare itself to “go into the local neighborhoods and make disciples of people who do not yet know the Lord”? One facetiously might ask, “Will they knock on their neighbors’ doors and leave tracts, or will they set up evangelistic rallies at the ends of cul-de-sacs?”

When this report was first issued to the church in 2014, it seemed to me that these questions simply had to be answered in order for any real transformation in the congregation to occur. So I set out to see if there was a method of leadership development and missional disciple making FPC could implement that could serve as vehicles for these transitions where other models for ministry and mission had seemingly failed in the church before. Much of the impetus

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48. It is interesting to note that the vision statement of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City does not so much describe a vision for their congregation as much as it speaks of their vision for the city and community in which they live: “The Redeemer family of churches and ministries exists to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, to the world” (“Our Vision,” Redeemer Churches and Ministries, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://www.redeemer.com/learn/vision\\_and\\_values](https://www.redeemer.com/learn/vision_and_values)). Similarly, the mission statement of the Austin Stone Community Church reads: “To build a great city, renewed and redeemed by a gospel movement, by being a church for the city of Austin that labors to advance the gospel throughout the nations” (Todd Engstrom, “What is a Missional Community?,” Verge, November 13, 2014, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community)). The church consists of a network of missional communities (<https://austinstone.org/connect/missional-community>).

for this thesis-project is the result of my search to resolve the unanswered questions of the TAG report.

A second major weakness of the report has to do with some of the categories it accentuates and the important questions it fails to ask. One of the major portions of the TAG report is the *Transforming Church Index* (TCI). According to the results of this survey, FPC scored high in the survey's scale for "Worship," "Building," and "Learning."<sup>49</sup> I believe the assessment accurately identifies FPC's strongest ministry elements. However, the TCI repeatedly asks survey respondents to consider to what degree they enjoy or are satisfied by the church's programming, then later the report chastises the congregation for its consumerism. In essence, the survey seems to extol the congregation's strengths and then it criticizes the church for focusing its ministry on them. Could it be that the very questions and categories of the survey itself perpetuate the idea that the congregation should relate to the church in attractional and consumeristic terms? If this is the case, then the report may actually make it more difficult to move the church from an attractional model to a more missional ministry approach, especially when these attractional categories are celebrated as strengths.

"Learning" scored as the highest strength of all of the measured scales in the TCI. Remarkably, of the seven questions in the Learning scale, four use the phrase "Christian

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49. Survey results are reported as percentage scores. Higher scores indicate that FPC ranks above the average when compared to the other churches in the TCI database. "The worship scale measures levels of satisfaction with music and sermons. It looks at whether or not the worship services are attracting new people. It looks at whether or not people are experiencing life-change as a result of the corporate worship experience" (*Transforming Church Index: Prepared for First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina, March 214*. TAG Consulting, 4). "A church's building and facilities expresses, symbolically, the church's code. This scale measures how well the buildings and facilities support your various ministries. It measures how appealing, friendly and accessible the facilities are" (TCI, 4). The TCI describes the "Learning" scale in this manner: "The scale measures your congregation's sense of personal growth that goes beyond mere knowledge. High scores indicate that your adult learning environment is resulting in people who feel prepared to minister and who believe your church has made a significant difference in their lives" (TCI, 4).

education” and the other three refer to “knowledge,” “teaching” and “educational programs.”<sup>50</sup>

None of the questions in the Learning section, or in any other portion of the survey, include the terms “disciple” or “discipleship” or “disciple making.” By using the term “Christian education,” the survey may reinforce the notion that growth in the Christian faith is principally tied to the passive acquisition of information that is transferred from one individual to another in a classroom and lecture format.

The survey does not ask how many people in the congregation are in a discipling relationship with another person. The two questions closest to this are: “The Christian education I have received from our church has prepared me well to minister to others” (83%) and “I have received training from this church in some form of outreach, evangelism, or missions work.”<sup>51</sup>

The second question does not specifically mention discipleship. The first reads nebulously. Could “minister to others” refer to ushering at the sanctuary doors or caring for someone in the hospital, or does it indeed include disciple making or maybe even adopting a child? Following the research of other writers, I will contend later in this thesis-project that the key central element of a missional church is a discipleship multiplication movement that is equipped, modeled and stewarded by staff and perpetuated by lay persons. It appears to me that the TAG report does not have such a movement within its frame of reference and instead assumes that discipleship can and does occur within the context of a Christian Education delivery model.

Though the Learning scores are the highest in the TCI, my informal surveys of the congregation seem to indicate that, despite the great level of biblical and doctrinal knowledge,

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50. The questions in the Learning scale are: “My knowledge of the Bible is growing as a result of attending this church” (97%). “Our church effectively teaches the core elements of our faith” (92%). “My understanding of faith has grown through our church’s educational programs” (91%). “Our church provides excellent Christian education for adults” (85%). “The Christian education I have received has prepared me well to minister to others” (83%). “Our church’s Christian education is relevant to my everyday life” (84%). “Our church’s Christian education has made a significant difference in my life” (86%) (*Discovery Report*, 7).

51. The *Discovery Report* does not provide FPC’s response to this question.

most do not feel they are able to disciple another person into spiritual maturity. One might wonder whether this because they believe they still do not know enough, or do they think that only a religious professional can do such a thing? Is it because they have not been trained and inspired to do so, or could it be that they have been schooled in the language of “Christian Education” for so long they do not even know what discipleship means, let alone how to do it? If the TAG organization is interested in moving congregations in a more missional direction, then the TCI survey would be more helpful if it asked about the capacity of covenant partners to replicate disciples.

There is one final critique of the TAG report along these same lines. The TCI survey uses the category “Outreach” to measure the impact of a congregation in its community.<sup>52</sup> However, this category implies an attractional model of ministry where the members of the church are encouraged to “reach out” to their neighbors and draw them into the programs of the church rather than to “live among” them missionally.<sup>53</sup> Though the *Discovery Report* contains a strong call for FPC to “go into the local neighborhoods and make disciples of people who do not yet know the Lord,” the TCI asks nothing about how well the congregation is currently doing that and the *Discovery Report* gives no clear strategies for how to do so. The TCI asserts, “A Missional church is one of service to each other and to the world.”<sup>54</sup> The statement leaves open the possibility that one can be “missional” by engaging in a local or international service project and then returning to the safety of one’s home without really having involved oneself relationally

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52. The TCI describes the “Learning” scale this way: “Is the church making an impact outside of itself? High scores indicate that the church has a good reputation, is making a contribution to the community, and is interested in making a difference in people’s lives. It is more concerned about external impact than internal growth” (TCI, 4).

53. “I have been encouraged by this church to reach out to my neighbors.” “Our church’s programs and ministries are effectively promoted in our community” (TCI, 33. The *Discovery Report* does not indicate FPC’s responses to these questions).

54. TCI, 5.

with another person. This is another example of the TAG consulting process actually reinforcing attractional thinking because of the questions and categories it employs. By using such language, the transformation process toward a missional culture can actually be made even harder for a congregation like FPC that is so imbued with an attractional approach to ministry.<sup>55</sup>

## **Summary**

Chapter one of this thesis-project notes the research setting for this project and some of the problems the congregation faces. FPC is a historic, 172-year-old congregation that was, until recent years, a part of the mainline Presbyterian Church (USA). Situated one block from Main Street, the church facility is located in one of the most dynamic and fastest growing cities in the United States. However, the growth of the congregation has not kept pace with the increasing population of the city, remaining essentially stagnant in worship attendance and manifesting a significant “back door” phenomenon in terms of membership. The congregation relies upon a Christian Education model for spiritual growth that apparently does not prepare its covenant partners to disciple others, nor does it engender the kind of community that many desire. The church also struggles with how to reach non-believers in the neighborhoods around the city, relying instead on its facilities, publicity, and outstanding programs to draw people to its church campus.

The congregation’s 2014 TAG consultant’s report recommends that FPC should prepare for the future by equipping itself to disciple both those who may come through its doors as well as the increasing number of people in its community who are not inclined to do so. For this new

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55. Though Ford acknowledges, “In order to understand how to reach a community best, you have to become a part of it,” the case studies he offers in *Transforming Church* still center around tailoring the ministry of the church so that people feel welcomed and understood at a central campus location (Ford, *Transforming Church*, 123-156).

approach to mission and ministry to take effect in FPC's culture, it will have to be accompanied by a shift in the activity and identity of its pastors from deliverers of religious goods and services and of its covenant partners from consumers of such. My thesis-project will contend that a transformational shift from a centralized, attractional model to a more decentralized, missional approach can occur when a self-replicating discipleship movement is introduced into the life of a congregation's culture. Further, a pastor can be a catalytic agent for adaptive change in this church's system when he or she embodies the activity, lifestyle and posture of a missional disciple maker and leads a small experimental learning group on the organizational edges of the church. Given FPC's strong commitment to scriptural authority, such a call to reconsider some of its traditionally held patterns of ministry must be grounded in a solid appeal to the biblical witness. It is to this that I now turn in chapter two.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Introduction: Three Shifts for Forming a Theological Framework for Congregational Transformation**

In order for a pastor to initiate and lead a process of transformation from within the life of a church, he or she must first have some understanding of the historical and theological trajectory of which the congregation is a part. With this perspective in hand, the pastor may then begin to construct an informed theological framework that can help differentiate church forms that are transient and bound by culture from those which represent a truer reclamation of the biblical witness. As it so happens, constructing such a framework, particularly at this point in the history of the Western Church, is both teeming with opportunities and fraught with challenges.

At no time since the sixteenth-century Reformation has the Doctrine of the Church been so highly debated among Christian scholars and practitioners. This debate has become acute over the last several decades for at least two reasons. The first is the rapid growth of the Christian Church outside of Western Christendom that has forced missionaries and theologians to consider what is essential to the life of the Church and what is contextual.<sup>1</sup> The second is a recognition that the Church in the West has moved from a position of privilege at the center of culture to its periphery. Because of these changing dynamics and others, traditional ecclesial formulations are seemingly becoming inadequate, prompting theologians around the world to reconsider, “What is essence of the Church?” and “What are the marks of it?”

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1. Veli-Matti Karkkainen in his *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* gives some examples of the types of challenges Church scholars must now face: “What does it require to be a church amidst an animistic culture in Africa or highly spiritualistic Asian cultures? What from the mainly Western heritage is transferable to the rest of the world, and what has to be revised and corrected?” (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 9. Karkkainen notes that up until the modern missionary movement almost all historic considerations of the nature and purpose of the Church have been produced from within a classic Western Christendom understanding.

In the response to these challenges, a number of broad theological shifts have been taking place over the last half century. Though these shifts may have been instigated by the disequilibrium of a changing cultural context, one positive result has been a healthy re-engagement with the scriptural witness.<sup>2</sup> Far from weakening the witness of the Church, these shifts have actually served to provide mainline North American Protestant churches like FPC with a firmer biblical and theological foundation in which to engage in mission and ministry. These shifts can be categorized into three broad areas of inquiry: the nature of God and mission, the way in which disciples are formed, and the relationship between the Church and culture.

Taken together, an understanding of these shifts can assist a pastor in at least three ways. First, they should aid in forming a solid ecclesiastical framework from which he or she may lead a congregation forward by the revealed Word of God. Second, they may help bring to light some of the inherent challenges and theological resources available for the process of initiating a missional discipleship movement in the congregation the pastor serves. Third, a clearer understanding of these shifts should aid in defining important phrases like “missional discipleship,” “missional church” and “missional discipleship multiplication movement.”

### **Shifts in our Understanding of the Nature of God and Mission: From the Church Having a Mission to God’s Mission Having a Church**

The first shift centers on a reclamation of the biblical understanding that God has revealed himself as a missionary God.<sup>3</sup> Theologian and missiologist David Bosch says, “Mission

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2. Dick Wiedenheft notes that “it sometimes takes a significant historical jolt for Christians to rediscover a major truth which is right there in the Bible” (*The Meaning of Missional: A Beginner’s Guide to Living Missionally and the Missional Church* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018], 28).

3. Classically Orthodox Reformed theologians assert that systematic theology should begin with God’s self-revelation and the resultant Doctrine of God should inform all other theological constructions. In contrast to this, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who many consider to be the father of modern Protestant theology in the West, in his 1831 second edition of *The Christian Faith*, famously tacked on his discussion of the Trinity as somewhat of an

[is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology.”<sup>4</sup> Orthodox Christian theology has traditionally spoken of God as infinite, sovereign, gracious, just and holy. These assertions are true and essential for indeed God is unchanging in his nature and pure in his character. But, if left alone, these attributes may also leave the impression that God can be conceived in terms of some static philosophical abstraction with partial affinity to Aristotle’s “unmoved mover.”

To this classic understanding of the nature of God, missional theologians have reminded the Church that the God of the Bible is also living, active, dynamic and relationally connected to his creation. He is at work in the world, taking the initiative to redeem the world.<sup>5</sup> He is a “sending” God: The Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Father, the Son and the Spirit send the Church.<sup>6</sup> This notion of God as a sending God is encapsulated in the Latin term *missio Dei*.

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appendix to his work (ed. H.R. McIntosh and J.S. Stewart [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986], 738-751). Schleiermacher made this theological move because he believed the classic orthodox understanding of the Trinity has no basis in Christian religious experience. In contrast, Karl Barth placed his discussion of the Trinity in the Prolegomena of his *Church Dogmatics I.1.* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990], 295-489). Barth contends that the Trinity forms the basis of the Christian faith and that it is rooted in the self-revelation of God as Lord. The last several decades has seen a profound renewal of Trinitarian theology. For example, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981) and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, second ed (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Cornerstones, 2016) and *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*, second ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Cornerstones, 2016). For more popular reads, see Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2002) and Roderick T. Leupp, *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology: Themes, Patterns Explorations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

4. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 399.

5. Bosch says the theologian Karl Barth is largely credited for introducing the idea that mission is an activity of God himself (*Transforming Mission*, 399). Christopher J. H. Wright asserts that the Bible was generated by and concerns itself primarily with God’s mission to the world: “Mission is what the Bible is all about” (*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006], 29). Thus, he calls for a missional hermeneutic in order to understand properly the grand sweep of the biblical narrative.

6. “The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world” (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 399).

Missional theologians see God's mission as the Church's originating impulse and its organizing principle. Darrell Guder maintains that mission is embedded in the divine initiative to heal the brokenness of the Fall, and thus mission is not merely a "program" of the Church or a subset of activity:

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. "Mission" means "sending," and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history. God's mission began with the call of Israel to receive God's blessing to the nations.... It continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it moves toward the promised consummation of God's salvation in the eschaton (the 'last' or 'final day').<sup>7</sup>

The Church is comprised of the "sent" people of God who are graciously invited to participate in God's mission to the world. God is on the move and by implication so are his people. With Guder, Lesslie Newbigin highlights the fundamental eschatological nature of the Church:

The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one. Therefore the nature of the Church is never to be finally defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological.<sup>8</sup>

Newbigin warns of the potential dangers to the external and internal life of a congregation when the eschatological dynamic of the Church is diminished:

When the eschatological and missionary perspective has been lost from the thinking of the Church, its task comes to be conceived in terms of the rescue of individuals one by one out of this present evil age and their preservation unharmed for the world to come. When this becomes dominant the Church thinks primarily of its duty to care for its own members, and its duty to those outside drops into second place. A conception of pastoral care is developed which seems to assume that the individual believer is primarily a

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7. Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 4.

8. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 25.

passive recipient of the means of grace which it is the business of the Church to administer. ‘The Church’, then comes to mean the paid ministry.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to this picture of a Church turned in on itself by clericalism and the need to “take care of its own,” Newbigin points to the active role of all believers in God’s mission to the world:

We must point to other parts of the New Testament which stress the responsibilities of the whole body as a royal priesthood, as the body of Christ in which every member has its proper function. The root of the error lies in the failure to keep in view throughout the *whole* salvation of which the Church is the sign and first-fruit and instrument. If this is done, the Church will be delivered from the tendency to turn in on itself and will always be turned outwards to the world.... It will understand that participation in Christ means participation in His mission to the world, and that therefore true pastoral care, true training in the Christian life, and true use of the means of grace will precisely be in and for the discharge of the missionary task.<sup>10</sup>

Following Newbigin, Bosch reiterates that the Church is the means by which God carries out his mission to the world. Given the *instrumental* character of the Church, it is more accurate to say that “the church has a mission,” than to state, “the mission has a church.”<sup>11</sup> Bosch states,

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9. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 146.

10. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 146.

11. This notion of the instrumental character of the Church as the *sine qua non* of missional ecclesiology has come under scrutiny from various corners. For example Mark Galli, former managing editor of the magazine *Christianity Today*, wrote a series of seven columns in 2019 entitled “The Elusive Presence” in which he charges that “when mission becomes the center, the focal point of the Christian life, I believe that life will inevitably degenerate into an active and busy religious life void of God” (Mark Galli, “How We Have Forgotten God,” Christianity Today, posted May 29, 2019, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/may-web-only/how-we-have-forgotten-god.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/may-web-only/how-we-have-forgotten-god.html)). Citing the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch (*A Theology for the Social Gospel* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987]) on mainline, liberal denominations like the PC(USA) and increasingly on evangelicals themselves, Galli criticizes the idea that “the purpose of the church, its very life blood, is its work in the world” (Mark Galli, “The Unfortunate Pedigree of the Missional Church,” Christianity Today, posted June 5, 2019, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/unfortunate-pedigree-of-missional-church.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/unfortunate-pedigree-of-missional-church.html)). In other words, the Church does not exist for the sake of the world. Instead, he asserts that “the church is not instrumental at all.... The church is its own end. It is created by God’s good pleasure and for our good pleasure. As a result of being called into the family called church, our job is to bask in its sheer goodness, by living together in holy love, and by together praising God’s glory for doing such a hilarious thing” (Mark Galli, “The Church does Not Exist for the Sake of the World,” Christianity Today, posted June 12, 2019, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/church-does-not-exist-for-sake-of-world.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/church-does-not-exist-for-sake-of-world.html)). Galli does not deny that the Church should reach out in mission. Rather, for him the issue is one of emphasis. He asks, “What if instead the church was a sanctuary, a place of rest and healing and life, where the fellowship of believers lived together in love, where we just learn to be holy and blameless in live before God? And what if having encountered afresh some sort of beatific vision, we go out from church in our vocations and ministries, serving the unchurched

Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God (cf. Aagaard 1973:11-15; 1974:421). ‘It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world: it is the mission of the Son and Spirit through the Father that includes the church’ (Moltmann 1977:64). Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission (Aagaard 1973:13). There is church because there is mission, not vice versa (Aagaard 1974:423). To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people since God is a fountain of sending love.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the most preeminent demonstration of “the movement of God’s love toward people” is God the Father’s sending of his Son into the world: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>13</sup> With the coming of the Son and the Spirit, the Triune God now sends the Church into the world: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’”<sup>14</sup>

All Christians, of course, would affirm the theological propositions of John 3:16 and 20:21, but missional scholars draw special attention to nature of this sending, that is, *how* God the Father sent the Son. Muslims believe God revealed himself in a book, the *Koran*. Gnostics

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neighbor and, by God’s grace, make a difference in their world?” (Mark Galli, “The Church’s Sickness Unto Death,” Christianity Today, posted June 26, 2019, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/churhcs-sickness-unto-death.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june-web-only/churhcs-sickness-unto-death.html)).

In response, Trevin Wax wrote a series of blogs for the Gospel Coalition web site in which he warns Galli of the danger of constructing an ecclesiology without mission at its heart: “What happens when a church’s worship *doesn’t* lead to mission? What happens when this church-centered approach that prioritizes the worship of God and our relationship to him leads to an inward-focused congregation? (Trevin Wax, “The Church Isn’t Missional?” The Gospel Coalition, posted August 14, 2019, accessed September 14, 2020, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/church-isnt-missional](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/church-isnt-missional)). Instead of exhausting the Church and distracting her from her zeal for God, Wax responds, “What if we need the missional conception of the church in order to maintain a strong relationship with God? What if the outward-focused missional impulse causes us to press deeper into our utter need for God, stirring up within us a sense of desperation as we learn our weaknesses and inabilities, as we recognize our need of the Spirit’s power?” (Trevin Wax, “The Beauty and Power of the Missional Church,” The Gospel Coalition, posted August 28, 2019, accessed September 14, 2020, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/beauty-power-missional-church](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/beauty-power-missional-church)). The answer of course is “both/and.” The Church is about both worship and mission, identity and function, covenant and kingdom, and Great Commandment and Great Commission. The Holy Spirit’s work upon the Church is both centripetal and centrifugal. The Church cannot be the Church unless it is both gathered and scattered.

12. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 400.

13. John 3:16.

14. John 20:21.

claim God sent Jesus to reveal secret knowledge. In contrast, Orthodox Christians assert that God revealed himself in the Person of his Son not merely so that a book could be written about him or that his teachings might enlighten humanity but that through him and in his sacrifice God's Kingdom would come and the curse of the Fall could be healed. In short, God sent himself in the flesh.

Missional practitioners insist that to be “missional” believers must engage the world in the flesh as Jesus did by going out and “living among” rather than just “reaching out” from time to time with projects and events that originate from a settled and static church context. Alan Hirsch and others commonly base this pattern of engagement on John 1:14a where it says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”<sup>15</sup> Just as Jesus established his presence by living among the people he was sent to reach, so his followers are also called to be a vital part of the fabric of their neighborhoods and relational affinity groups.<sup>16</sup> And just as Jesus was directly involved in the lives of those he was called to reach, so too believers are called to be genuinely available in the communities in which we live.<sup>17</sup> Writers like Michael Frost use such phrases as

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15. Cf. Philippians 2:5-11. See for example, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Ministry for the 21st Century*, second ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2013), 55; and Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, *The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 30. “To move into the culture is to take the idea of incarnational mission seriously. This in turn takes its cue from the fact that God took on human form and moved into our neighborhood, assumed the full reality of our humanity, identified with us, and spoke to us from within a common experience. Following his example, and in his cause, we take the same type of approach when it comes to mission” (Alan Hirsh and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011], 38).

16. “I have seen churches develop this (connection) in the strangest of normal places: along riverbanks with the waterskiing communities, rave clubs, amateur drama theatres, online game communities. I know of one young mom who, instead of attending the local church’s MOPS program, chose to adopt one of the many local non-Christian mothers groups. She was soon asked to lead it and her influence as a Christian was significantly magnified, more than if she had simply attended the local Christian version” (Hirsh and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 39).

17. For more on the Incarnation of Jesus and incarnational lifestyles see Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 131-147.

“incarnational posture” to describe this missional lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, they assert that in order to engage in incarnational ministry one must live in close proximity to those to whom they are sent:

If exiles today are to model their lives and ministries on that of the exile Jesus, they must take a stance that promotes proximity between themselves and those among whom they live.... We cannot demonstrate Christlikeness at a distance from those whom we are called to serve. We need to get close enough to people that our lives rub up against their lives, and that they see the incarnated Christ in our values, beliefs, and practices as expressed in cultural forms that make sense and convey impact.<sup>19</sup>

Brad Brisco and Lance Ford add that this may mean actually moving closer geographically to those whom God has called believers to reach.<sup>20</sup> “At the very least,” they say, “this will demand creating time and space to be directly and actively involved in the lives of people we are seeking to reach.”<sup>21</sup>

To summarize thus far, with the reclamation of the missionary nature of the Trinitarian God there has been a shift in understanding *from God’s Church having a mission to God’s mission having a Church*. As simple and as subtle as this sentence may seem, it contains profound implications for the way we understand God, the Church, mission, and their relation to the world around us. One of these implications is that the Church is called to pattern its life by what God has done in Jesus by sending Christ in the flesh. This in turn has much to say about

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18. See the chapter “Adopting an Incarnational Posture” in Michael Frost’s, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 160-174; and Dana Allin, *Simple Discipleship: Grow Your Faith, Transform Your Community* (Carol Stream, IL: NavPress, 2018), 82-85. See also, Hugh Halter, *Flesh: Bringing the Incarnation Down to Earth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014); Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, *The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church for the Long Run* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2013); Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*.

19. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 54-55.

20. Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials: A Guide for Experiencing God’s Mission in Your Life* (Kansas City, MO: The House Studio, 2012), 19.

21. Brisco and Ford, *Missional Essentials*, 19.

how followers of Jesus are called to pattern their own lives, and this relates to the next shift to be considered.

### **Shifts in Discipleship: From Information Transfer to Missional Discipleship Transformation**

While keeping the sending nature of the Triune God in mind and the eschatological and incarnational missionary impulse of the Church firmly recognized as the pattern of her Lord, the next natural theological topic to consider is *how* the Church has and should equip and send followers of Jesus. The simple and obvious answer, of course, is that the Church should do this the way that Jesus equipped and sent his own disciples. If that is the case, then, certainly with what has been seen so far, it can be said that a follower of Jesus today is to be formed and prepared to live in close, relational proximity with those who have not heard the good news of the Kingdom.

Given the many Bible studies and adult Sunday School classes that are so characteristic of most Presbyterian congregations like FPC, one would think that mainline Reformed Christians would be well positioned to detect any obvious set of tactics Jesus might have employed to ready his followers for a life of ministry and mission. But while Presbyterians historically have been very diligent about searching and learning the *content* of the Scripture, that is, the “what” of discipleship, they seemingly have not always been as attentive to the specific *approach* that Jesus took to mold his followers, that is, the “how” of discipleship.

This may be a natural byproduct of the fact that mainline Presbyterians may be shyer of the term “discipleship” than even the word “evangelism.” Mainline Reformed literature from the

last sixty years appears almost completely bereft of the term.<sup>22</sup> What does seem clear, given the distinct emphasis on listening to sermons and attending instructional lessons, is that for mainline Presbyterian congregational life the Sunday School class, the Bible Study and the Sunday morning message are considered to be the key vehicles for growth in discipleship.<sup>23</sup>

From their inception, Presbyterians have always maintained a historic commitment to education, including especially higher education.<sup>24</sup> Reformed theologian John Leith lists the “Life of the Mind as the Service of God” as one of the key aspects of the Presbyterian and

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22. For example, the series preface of the Covenant Life Curriculum of the “Southern” Presbyterian Church U.S. speaks of the “necessity for careful systematic *study* of the Christian faith and its relevance for today” but does not include the word “discipleship” anywhere within its multiple volumes (William Bean Kennedy, *Into the Covenant Life: Volume 1* [Richmond, VA: The CLC Press, 1963], 3, emphasis mine. See also Waldo Beach, *The Christian Life: Teacher’s Book* [Richmond, VA: The CLC Press, 1966]). The curriculum is obviously intended for a classroom setting with lecture and discussion. The word “discipleship” appears nowhere in Johnson, Hoge and Luidens’s article “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline.” Apart from the title of the book and first line of the introduction, the term “discipleship” is not mentioned again in Coulter, Mulder and Weeks, eds., *The Diversity of Discipleship: The Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Christian Witness*. There are at least a few exceptions. Donald K. McKim’s curriculum entitled *New Members Workbook: Call to Discipleship* lists a number of ways members can express their discipleship by participating in the life of a local congregation: worship attendance, praying for others, studying Scripture, evangelism, service, and giving of one’s time, money and talents (Louisville, KY: CPM, 2015). Though the curriculum is relatively recent, it does not offer a strategy for multiplying disciples from within a relational context nor does it mention missional communities as a means to connect with networks and neighborhoods. Steven Eason in his book on PC(USA) Presbyterian officer training, *Making Disciples, Making Leaders: A Manual for Developing Church Officers*, uses the word “discipleship” three times before turning on page four and following to the language of “spiritual formation,” and “leadership development” (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2004). Even in the first three pages the term is never explicitly defined.

23. When writing on the importance of preaching for Presbyterians, John Leith says, “The Reformed community has always had great confidence, perhaps too great confidence, on written and spoken words and, in particular, in the power of preaching, when blessed by the Holy Spirit, to change human life and to create a godly public opinion” (John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981], 84.) He also notes that Calvin believed preaching was the usual means of God’s grace and power (*An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, 83).

24. Following his humanist training, John Calvin believed that education was key to the reformation of the Church. In 1559 he founded the Geneva Academy in Switzerland to educate the poor in the liberal arts and sciences. An early proponent of universal education, his plan in Geneva included “a system of elementary education in the vernacular for all, including reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and religion, and the establishment of secondary schools for the purpose of training citizens for civil and ecclesiastical leadership” (Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004], 177). By the beginning of the 19th century, there were more than one hundred Presbyterian colleges in the United States. Since that time, the number of colleges and universities related to the PC(USA) has dwindled to 56 (see “The Ecology of Nurturing Faith: Education, Disciplines, and Programs for Faith Development” in Milton Coalter, John J. Milton, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, eds., *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 191-222. See also “Being ‘Presbyterian Related’,” Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://www.presbyteriancolleges.org/being\\_presbyterian\\_related\\_](https://www.presbyteriancolleges.org/being_presbyterian_related_).

Reformed ethos.<sup>25</sup> He writes about how the Western humanist drive of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, of which John Calvin and the other Reformers were a part, influenced the trajectory of the Reformed theological tradition and education:

Wherever the Reformed community went, it established schools alongside the churches not only to teach the Bible or to teach reading and other skills to study the Bible but also to teach the whole range of liberal arts in order to liberate the human spirit. Furthermore, Reformed theology has always been careful in the historical study of the sources of the faith, especially of the Bible and of the intention of Jesus Christ for the Christian and the church.<sup>26</sup>

Though the Reformed approach to Christian education and education in general has had a profoundly positive influence upon Western Culture, it will be shown later in this section, that this academic approach to discipleship is a far cry from that of Jesus, Paul and the believers in the early Church all of whom never relied primarily upon information transfer outside the context of a deeply relational community as a way of molding the character of new believers.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation and then the Enlightenment, disciple making in Western Culture and the Reformed tradition in particular became more and more synonymous with classroom instruction.<sup>28</sup> Following its Presbyterian

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25. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, 80.

26. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, 80-81.

27. See Schmidt's chapter, "Christianity's Imprint on Education," in *How Christianity Changed the World*, 170-193.

28. The catechetical process of the early, underground church eventually gave rise to few catechetical schools which had a strong literary emphasis. Schmidt writes, "By about A.D. 150, Justin Martyr, often called the first great scholar of the Christian church, established such catechetical schools, one in Ephesus and one in Rome. Soon these schools appeared in other regions" (*How Christianity Changed the World*, 171). From the fourth to the tenth centuries, cathedral schools developed around Western Europe. Led by bishops, "these schools taught not only Christian doctrine but commonly also the seven liberal arts, the 'trivium' [grammar, rhetoric, and logic] and 'quadrivium' [arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy]" (173). By the 11th century these schools along with their monastery counterparts emerged as centers of higher learning" (*How Christianity Changed the World*, 185-190). Cathedral schools were the precursors to the modern European university system.

heritage, FPC has done much the same, wedding itself to a large degree to this classroom-centric approach to disciple making.<sup>29</sup>

Mike Breen notes that in the traditional classroom format, “information, processes and facts are...passed on in a didactic manner, from the lecturer to the students who are learning this information.”<sup>30</sup> The classroom-focused strategy for Christian discipleship is built upon the Enlightenment assumption that the human problem is ignorance and that if a student receives enough quality biblical and doctrinal information, life transformation will occur, albeit by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This same information-produces-transformation model can be seen at work in contemporary private devotionals and curriculum-driven small groups and in listening to sermons.

Several problems with the classroom model for discipleship have become apparent over the years. First, classroom participants can become caught in a cycle of not acting on their faith because they do not think they know enough. Second, the classroom and sermon format lack a mechanism for accountability. The hearer may simply ignore what God is saying to him or her without a personal challenge to apply the Word of God to their lives. Third, mastering any kind of skill, including disciple making, involves more than receiving information. As an analogy, one would never go to a heart surgeon who had merely read a book and attended lectures about heart surgery. Instead, one would want a surgeon who had practiced surgery under the careful tutelage of another experienced surgeon. Lastly, the classroom format usually fails to include some intentional plan for reproducibility. As a result, the student may return to the class over and over

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29. Over the years this over-emphasis on a purely academic approach to disciple-making (under the label of “Christian education”) has earned Presbyterians a number of nicknames like “brains on sticks.” This researcher likes to use the phrase “Presbyterian gnosticism.”

30. Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*, 3rd ed. (Pawley’s Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016), 22.

again simply to enjoy receiving new information without any compulsion to apply that which is learned to their own lives or to replicate their learning in the life of another. The end result is someone who is a consumer of information rather than an agent of spiritual change in the lives of others. Austin C. Kopack summarizes the weaknesses of this “head knowledge” approach to discipleship: “A Christian education focused on simply teaching theological truths may succeed in cultivating Christian minds yet fail to shape these deeper narratives tied up in the rest of life, stopping short of actually transforming the whole person by reshaping the object of their loves and reorienting the *telos* of their habits towards the person of Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

The results of this classroom-centric approach to discipleship on the Church in North America have been devastating. A study co-sponsored by Discipleship.org and Exponential found that fewer than 5% of churches in the US have a reproducing disciple-making culture.<sup>32</sup> Unlike China, India and other places where the Church is emerging, there are no viral-like disciple-making movements in North America, and there are no commonly understood definitions for terms like “discipleship,” “disciple,” and “disciple-making.”<sup>33</sup> The study

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31. Austin C. Kopack, “A Christian *Habitus*: Wittgenstein and Liturgical Formation,” *Lumen et Vita* 9, no. 2 [2019], accessed March 10, 2021, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/lumenetvita/article/view/11129/9401>, 49.

32. Discipleship.org, Exponential, and Grey Matter Research, *National Study on Disciple Making in USA Churches: High Aspirations Amidst Disappointing Results*, March 2020, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://discipleship-org.s3.amazonaws.com/text/ebooks/Final+2020\\_National\\_Study\\_Report.pdf?ck\\_subscriber\\_id=134266632](https://discipleship-org.s3.amazonaws.com/text/ebooks/Final+2020_National_Study_Report.pdf?ck_subscriber_id=134266632), 3.

33. The report says there are over 1,000 identifiable disciple-making movements around the world, none of which are in the USA. The authors provide ten character traits of disciple-making movement churches. These characteristics include: “Jesus-style disciple-making is the core mission of the church.... The church regularly multiplies disciples and disciple makers,” and “The core leadership teams focus, not just on making disciples, but on making disciple-makers (of lay leaders) with at least 40% of core leadership time spent personally equipping and coaching leaders in the disciple-making process (outside weekly gatherings)” (*National Study on Disciple Making*, 13-14).

concludes that a majority of American pastors overestimate the disciple-making effectiveness of their church because the actual numbers do not match their aspirations.<sup>34</sup>

Chapter one of this thesis-project opens with a story from FPC that highlights its recurring struggle to make replicating disciples. Chapter one also includes research from noted scholars who claim this same phenomenon is endemic to almost all historic mainline Presbyterian churches.<sup>35</sup>

Prompted by the circumstances surrounding these declining trends among Presbyterians and other mainline bodies and inspired, once again, by a close reading of scripture, a number of current writers on Christian discipleship have been calling the Church in the West to shift back to a form of discipleship that is both effective in our time and faithful to the example of Christ and his early Church.

The word “disciple” (*mathetes*) occurs 264 times in the NT. It can either mean someone who is an adherent or pupil of a teacher or an apprentice who is learning from a trade master.<sup>36</sup> The two meanings are closely related because, in the Jewish milieu of the NT, rabbis were the

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34. “Of the pastors who claimed 90% or more of their congregation are active disciple makers, 64% have seen no numerical growth in the last year.... Just 15% of pastors said their church has a simple, reproducible model to equip their members to make disciples and a framework or metric for measuring their success at doing so. Only 7% agreed strongly that they have both.... Among pastors claiming all of their core leaders prioritize disciple-making, 78% aren’t hearing stories of disciple-making success on a weekly basis; 42% aren’t even hearing them on a monthly basis.... American Protestant pastors are...over-estimating the disciple-making efforts and effectiveness of their church. The real numbers simply do not back up the perceptions of many pastors” (*National Study on Disciple Making*, 9, 11). Greg Ogden asserts, “Ninety percent of believers have never had someone take them under their wing and made sure that the basic disciplines, doctrines, character qualities, or ministry issues have been inculcated in their lives. This occurs when someone invests himself in the life of another to guide him into the breadth of the new life in Christ (Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids,: Zondervan, 2003], 151).

35. See Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” *First Things*, March 1993, accessed May 14, 2020, [www.firstthings.com/article/1993/03/mainline-churches-the-real-reason-for-decline](http://www.firstthings.com/article/1993/03/mainline-churches-the-real-reason-for-decline).

36. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 485). Hereafter, “BAGD.”

religious craft masters of their time. They were teachers and practitioners of the Law.<sup>37</sup> The disciple of a rabbi was called to imitate the rabbi's life in every way: to study, walk, cut his hair, dress and speak exactly like his master.<sup>38</sup> A good rabbi would invite his followers into a discipling relationship with him, granting them personal access to his life and modeling for them consistent behavior and application of the Law. Mike and Sally Breen note that the goal of the disciple was to represent the rabbi faithfully not simply by knowing what the rabbi knows but also by becoming who the rabbi is.<sup>39</sup> As the *mathetes* accompanied the rabbi through life, from time to time the rabbi would send his disciples out and then later in the day he would debrief their experiences with them, offering his feedback and encouragement for how they could improve the next time.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that Jesus of Nazareth saw himself as a rabbi and his followers as his disciples. Jesus accepted the appellation “rabbi” on multiple occasions, and he declares that to be a disciple is to become like his master.<sup>41</sup> He invited his disciples to be “with him” so that they might journey through a whole-life, everyday immersive discipleship experience with him as the

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37. Pierson Parker, “Rabbi, Rabboni,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, R-Z, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 3.

38. The rabbis were “very detailed-oriented and quite precise, right down to the length of their hair, prayer shawls, eating, sleeping, and ‘bathroom’ habits. In almost every way that we can imagine, the life of the Rabbi was transferred into...(the disciples’) lives” (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 31).

39. Mike Breen and Sally Breen, *Family on Mission: Integrating Discipleship into the Fabric of our Lives*, 2nd ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2018, 56).

40. Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 21.

41. “In the NT, ‘rabbi’ is simply an honorific title with no overtones of official appointment.... Both ‘rabbi’ and ‘rabboni’ are used in direct reference to (Jesus). This occurs twice in Matthew and four or five times in Mark.... Supremely it is in the Fourth Gospel which has Jesus honored in this way. It is done by inquirers, (John 1:49; 6:25) and even a Pharisee (3:2), as well as by Jesus’ own followers (4:31; 9:2; 11:8)” (Parker, “Rabbi, Rabboni,” 3). See Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 6:40.

Incarnate Word of God.<sup>42</sup> Readers of the early chapters in the synoptic Gospels can see a rhythmic pattern of behavior between Jesus and his followers that is reflective of the rabbinical practice for training disciples. Jesus would begin his day in prayer, gather his disciples around him for teaching and instruction, and then send them out to engage in ministry and mission. Later in the day he would debrief their experiences with them.<sup>43</sup> This rhythmic pattern of missional discipleship activity can be encapsulated in three words: worship, fellowship and mission. The Breenes point out the consistent and predictable manner in which Jesus maintains this pattern both before his disciples and the crowds who were watching him:

He [Jesus] established predictable patterns with his disciples in the regular meals they eat together, his itinerant teaching, times of retreat and rest, routines of synagogue attendance and temple worship, and regular rhythms of personal prayer.... In addition to their rhythm of life, there was predictability about the way Jesus responded to situations and people. There wasn't a sense of insecurity when someone approached him or began to argue with him or tried to refute him. People weren't unsure about [how] he would respond. He remained very predictable in his responses to the disciples, the Pharisees, and the crowds.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus explains to his followers that becoming like him involves modeling his same message, ministry and compassion, practicing the same religious and social traditions, belonging to the same family of obedience, exercising the same servanthood, and experiencing the same suffering.<sup>45</sup> Then after his resurrection at the very end of the Gospel of

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42. "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mark 3:14-15). "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

43. Luke 6:12-19; 10:17. Writers on Christian discipleship affirm that Jesus *did* pass on information to his followers, but he did this within a rabbinical arrangement where the disciple learns to mimic the life and teachings of the rabbi. These rabbinical relationships were embedded within the backdrop of a larger community of the rabbi's disciples. (See Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 58-61).

44. Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 70-71.

45. On ministry and compassion see Matthew 10:5-15. On traditions see Mark 2:18-22; Matthew 12:1-8. On obedience see Matthew 12:46-49. On servanthood see Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 20:26-28; John 13:12, 17. On suffering see Matthew 10:16-25; Mark 10:38-39.

Matthew, Jesus sets out the mission for his followers.<sup>46</sup> They are to “move out” (*poreuthentes*) and “make disciples” (*matheteusate*) from among all the people groups of the world (*panta ta ethne*) by reproducing the life they have found in Jesus in others. Jesus’ disciples are to do this by “baptizing” (*baptizontes*) those who receive his message of the Kingdom, thereby including them in the community of believers and connecting them to the power of the Triune God, and “teaching” (*didaskontes*) these new adherents not simply to know his words but to obey them. These new followers are taught by offering them a living example to imitate.<sup>47</sup> All disciples of Jesus are called to this task. The result of this disciple-making strategy is to be an exponential multiplication of believers from among every relational people network on the earth.<sup>48</sup>

The Apostle Paul took Jesus’ relational disciple-making strategy with him into the Greco-Roman world, but he faced an imposing challenge since most Gentiles were unfamiliar with the rabbi-disciple relationship. As a result, Paul adapted his disciple-making metaphor to one that would be understood: the parent/child relationship. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 4:14-27 Paul writes,

I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians [*pedagogoi*] in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.<sup>49</sup>

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46. Matthew 28:18-20.

47. The verbal forms here are notoriously difficult to translate. The main verb *matheteuo* is in the imperative and the three subordinate participles *poreuthentes*, *baptizovtes*, *didaskontes* take on the imperative force of the verb (see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b [Dallas: Word Books, 1995], 886). Frederick Dale Bruner explains that since the first of these participles grammatically precedes the main verb, “the move here is probably also a dynamic command and not just a casual auxiliary. Thus *poreuthentes* should probably not be translated ‘as you go’; it is a constituent part of the missional command and means ‘get moving!’” (*The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, Matthew: A Commentary, vol. 2, rev. & exp. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990], 815).

48. Matthew 13:23.

49. Note the familial language Paul uses throughout this passage. Paul’s use of family terms here and in many other places in his writings will be highlighted as a part of the third shift in this chapter.

A *pedagogos* was a live-in tutor who was hired by a Greco-Roman family to teach the children the basics of a classical education: reading, writing, mathematics and logic.<sup>50</sup> When the children turned twelve, the girls were turned over to their mothers to learn how to manage the complexities of the household and the boys were taken by their fathers to learn the family business. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he knew they would understand that

there were lots of people around who could give them the right information, but what they truly needed to grow into the fullness of life in Christ was a father – a *spiritual parent* who would invite them into his or her life, giving access so they could imitate the way of Christ in the spiritual parent’s life.... Eventually those who imitate start households of their own and innovate on what they’ve learned, modeling for others what they themselves have learned.<sup>51</sup>

The parent/child relationship offered Paul the perfect metaphor to bring forward Jesus’ relational approach to disciple making into the Gentile world, and it forms the backdrop for other places in Paul’s writings where he speaks of the need for mature believers to disciple successive generations.<sup>52</sup>

The Ante-Nicene Church also relied upon an adaption of the parent/child discipleship relationship in its catechetical process before giving way to a more classroom-centric model in

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50. Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 54.

51. Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 55-56, emphasis mine.

52. For example, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:1-2). In the 19th century, F.C. Bauer and H.J. Holtzmann considered 2 Timothy 2:2 evidence that the teaching of the Gospel was limited in the later epistles to those who had been recognized and ordained as a part of a proto-catholic succession of leaders (See E.E. Ellis, “Pastoral Letters” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993], 659. Others see no such evidence here. W.G. Kummel states, “There is no chain of succession constructed from Paul via his apostolic disciples to the holders of the office in their congregations – not even in II Tim 2:2” (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1975], 381-382). Similarly, William D. Mounce says that 2 Tim. 2:2 is “not a formal institutionalization of apostolic succession for the preservation of the Christian Creed, ...we simply have Paul himself charging Timothy, and his interest is in the reliability rather than of the status of the men Timothy will select” (*Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2000], 504-505). Elsewhere he adds, “There is nothing in the passage, or elsewhere, that limits teaching to elders alone. The person’s competency relates to the ability and giftedness to teach” (507). Hence, the discipleship mandate is open to all believers throughout the NT who are qualified by their giftedness and character and not just to those who have been ordained.

the following centuries.<sup>53</sup> Alan Kreider argues that the early Church grew so dramatically not because of its persuasive arguments or large evangelistic or worship events but by the attractiveness of their habitual behavior (*habitus*), that is, their embodiment of the message of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Catechumenates were rehabituated through a long, patient, usually three-year process that featured spiritual practices, teaching and, very importantly, apprenticeship. Each catechumenate was paired with a “sponsor” of their own choosing who would spiritually parent him or her through the catechetical process. Using the example of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, Kreider remarks,

The catechumens were conscious that they were apprentices, and they learned to be Christians by watching believers whom they admired. They often initially approached the church because of a Christian whose behavior or attitudes had especially appealed to them. These relationships often continued between the catechumens and the people who now were their sponsors. Throughout Cyprian’s period as a catechumen, Caecilianus continued as “the friend and comrade of his soul.” When Cyprian was baptized, Caecilianus was there as “the parent of his new life.” Eventually, when Cyprian was martyred (258AD), he commended his wife and children to Caecilianus’s care.... Imitation of this sort must have continued in many places where the master-apprentice relationship was a normal part of the catechetical process.<sup>55</sup>

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53. See page 42, footnote 28 regarding the evolution of the catechetical process from that of a relational/behavior-shaping model to the classroom/academic approach.

54. Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 134. Worship services were open only to those who had been catechized. In contrast to the attractional model of church growth so prevalent in North America today, Kreider claims that the pre-Nicæa Church did not grow by opening its worship services: “By the late second century many Christian communities had decided that outsiders – non-Christians – could not be admitted to their worship services.... It was not Christian worship that attracted outsiders, it was Christians who attracted them, and outsiders found the Christians attractive because of their Christian *habitus*, which catechesis and worship had formed” (134-135).

55. Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 159. Kreider says that potential members learned the *Didache* (150AD) “by apprenticing themselves to community members, who were examples, craftsmen of the Christian way” and adds that “ordinary community members...apparently served as the trainers...of this apprenticing” (139). He also notes that Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200 AD, observed that a “sponsor” was absolutely necessary due to the rigorous character of the catechetical process. Clement writes: “It is therefore an absolute necessity that you who are haughty and powerful and rich should appoint for yourself some man of God as trainer and pilot. Let there be at all events, one whom you respect, one whom you fear, one whom you accustom yourself to listen to when he is outspoken and severe, though all the while at your service” (Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives* 40-41, trans. G.W. Butterworth [public domain], 355, quoted in Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 152).

The highest goal of this relational experience in Christian training was not simply intellectual development. Rather, it was behavioral transformation:

The teachers conveyed to the candidates that, although they valued education (Origen in Caesarea made no bones about this fact), refined learning was not the point; the catechesis was not designed to produce sophisticated thought but “character” and “virtuous living.” The church’s growth was the product, not of the Christians’ persuasive powers, but of their convincing lifestyle.... Actions said it all.<sup>56</sup>

Although the catechetical process apparently was not completely uniform in practice throughout the Empire, and how could it be given the limits on communication caused by distance and the threat of persecution, it is clear that the Ante-Nicene Church did maintain a universally high commitment toward intentionally preparing people for a life of discipleship. The high behavioral standards, apart from keeping the fellowship safe from the Empire’s informants, served to ensure that new believers could withstand the vicissitudes of second-century living and the Church could maintain a consistent witness in the community. Once again, as with Jesus and Paul, the *tactical method* they used was highly relational, and it centered on the ability of everyday, mature disciples to apprentice those who were new to the faith. The *goal* of the discipleship process is mature allegiance to and faith in Jesus. The overall *strategy* for reaching that goal can be encapsulated in the NT noun *katartismos* (“equipping”) and its language variants.<sup>57</sup>

BGAD indicates quite a range of meaning for the verbal form *katartizo* which is used some thirteen times in the NT.<sup>58</sup> Many of these uses overlap one another with only small nuances of meaning differentiating them. For clarity’s sake, Greg Ogden classifies the use of *katartizo*

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56. Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 155, 156.

57. The root of *katartismos* is the adjective *artios*. *Artios* only occurs in the NT in 2 Timothy 3:17 and it means “complete, capable, proficient” (BAGD, 110).

58. BAGD, 417-418.

into three categories.<sup>59</sup> First, it can mean to mend or restore something or someone who is broken.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in some places it refers literally to mending nets or figuratively to restoring someone to their former state.<sup>61</sup> Ogden says that its common, secular use was in a medical context: “When a limb was broken or pulled out of joint, doctors *equipped* their ailing patients by putting it back into proper alignment. Thus, the secular meaning entails restoring what is broken and correcting what is out of place so that it can return to its original, intended function.”<sup>62</sup>

The second category of meaning that Ogden finds has to do with establishing or laying biblical and theological foundations.<sup>63</sup> This includes, of course, ecclesiology. Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, is the Head, the Cornerstone and the one true Foundation of the Church who gathers and scatters the Church for its work in the world.<sup>64</sup> He is also the One who equips the Church for its work. In the benediction of the Book of Hebrews, the writer says, “Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our

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59. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 135-139.

60. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 137-139.

61. Thus, as in the cleaning, mending and folding together of nets (Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19). “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should *restore* that person gently” (Galatians 6:1a); “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! *Strive for full restoration*, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11); “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself *restore* you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10). Under the category of mending and restoring it can also mean to restore that which is lacking as in 1 Thessalonians 3:10: “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and *supply what is lacking* in your faith.” This restoration includes unity within the Body: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be *perfectly united* in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

62. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 137. Cf. BAGD, *katartismos*, “setting of a bone,” 418.

63. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 145-151.

64. See 1 Corinthians 3:11. Also, Matthew 16:18; Acts 8:1; Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9-10; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:5.

Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip [*katartizo*] you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ.”<sup>65</sup>

Jesus is the one who enables his followers to engage in mission and ministry. Holy Scripture, the Word of God written, is the tool he uses to prepare and equip the Church for disciple making: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped [*artios/exertismenos*] for every good work.”<sup>66</sup>

If Scripture is the primary tool for equipping believers to live a life of discipleship, then the primary manner in which they are equipped is the rabbi/disciple, parent/child, master/apprentice relational model detailed earlier. It is clear that this was the primary tactic the NT and pre-Nicene early Church used to train and multiply followers of Jesus. In Luke 6:40, Jesus brings together both the manner in which disciples are trained, the incarnational rabbi/disciple relationship, and the goal of that training: spiritual maturity matching that of the rabbi: “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is *katartizo* (“fully trained” NAS, NIV, ESV; “fully qualified” NRSV; “perfected” ASV; “fully prepared” CEB; “fully taught”

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65. Hebrews 13:20-21.

66. 2 Timothy 3:16-17. In verse 17, the NIV conflates *artios* and *exertismenos* in its translation, obscuring the force of the sentence and missing the play on words (as highlighted on page 51, footnote 57, the root of *katartismos* is *artios*). William D. Mounce, states, “It is difficult to bring the play on words into English. Paul says that Scripture makes the person of God proficient (*artios*) and then uses the cognate verb (in a compound form with the perfective preposition) to emphasize that Timothy is fully equipped (*exertismenos*). The emphasis is on the sufficiency of Scripture to provide the knowledge and direction for Timothy’s ministry” (William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000], 571). To this Mounce also says, “Scripture comes from God and is true, therefore it provides the content and direction necessary for...all Christians to be fully equipped” (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570-571). Ogden adds, “‘Complete’ means that we are prepared or enabled to do the ministry (good works) God has for us. The use of the perfect passive tense (*exertismenos*) means that the Word of God acts upon us at a point in the past and continues to affect us in the present, empowering us for every good deed” (Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 147).

RSV) will be like their teacher.”<sup>67</sup> Not only are disciples equipped to follow the model of the master, they trained in a way that teaches them to disciple others as well.<sup>68</sup>

The third category of meaning that Ogden finds for *katartizo* is to prepare and train.<sup>69</sup> In the post-Pentecost Church, Jesus has gifted some members of the Body with the ability to equip others for ministry so that the fullness of Christ may be expressed in the Church and for the world:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to prepare [*katartismos*; “perfect” KJV; “equip” RSV/NRSV/ESV] his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

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67. Reflecting on this passage, Ogden echoes the insights of Breen and the research of Kreider and others on the way in which Jesus and his early followers discipled successive generations of believers: “Christian maturity does not result from the accumulation of head knowledge. Reflecting the rabbinical educational model, Jesus believed that a teacher’s role was to model, or be an example in his life of what the students were expected to learn. A rabbi was said to be “the living Torah” (Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 148.)

68. A growing number of authors are writing about how to multiply disciples in a North American context. See for example, Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, rev. & exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018); Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship Shift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Neil Cole, *Cultivating A Life For God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (n.p., CMA Resources, 2014); and Steve Smith with Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011). For more on the ministry philosophy behind discipleship multiplication movements, see Neil Cole *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2010), and Todd Wilson, *Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication* (Carolina Beach, NC: Exponential Resources, 2014).

69. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 151-155.

70. Ephesians 4:11-13. There is debate regarding the inclusion of a comma in English translations between the second and third prepositional phrases in verse 12: *pros ton katartismos ton hagion eis ergon diakonias eis oikodomen tou somatos tou Christou*. The KJV includes the comma: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Later translations omit the comma: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” NRSV; “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” NIV. Some would say that the issue at stake is the relationship between clergy and lay people. The question is whether the leader (i.e., clergy) does all three tasks, including the work of ministry, or do the people perform the second two – the work of ministry and the building up? Andrew T. Lincoln argues for the first interpretation: “The change of preposition cannot bear the weight of such an argument, and there are, in fact, no grammatical or linguistic grounds for making a specific link between the first and second phrases. An active role for all believers is safeguarded by vv 7, 16, but the primary context here in v 12 is the function and role of Christ’s specific gifts, the ministers, not that of all the saints... It is certainly preferable, therefore, to see the three prepositional phrases here as each dependent on the notion of giving ministers, and hard to avoid the suspicion that opting for the other view is too often motivated by a zeal to avoid clericalism and to support a ‘democratic’ model of the Church” (*Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 [Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 253).

According to the Apostle Paul, as these five differently gifted equippers in Ephesians 4:11, popularly termed “APEST” by a number of current scholars, function according to their callings in the Church, they will prepare other members of the Body for mission and ministry by helping them to discover and cultivate their own aptitudes and giftedness.<sup>71</sup> The results of this equipping environment are: unity in the Church’s life together and its knowledge of Christ; spiritual maturation of individual believers and the Church as a whole; and a full expression of the glorified Christ, the standard to which the Church and disciples of Jesus are to measure their lives.

At the time of the writing of the later NT documents like Ephesians, the leadership structure of the early Church remained fluid. It had not formalized its leadership into an ordained class, and, certainly, it was not reflective of John Calvin’s 16<sup>th</sup>-century four-fold offices for the

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However, apparently a majority of scholars now argue against the inclusion of the extra comma. Representative of this position is F.F. Bruce: “The three prepositional phrases in this verse are not coordinate with another.... The second and third phrases are dependent on the first, as is indicated by their being introduced by a different preposition from the first” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and the Ephesians* NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company 1984], 349); cf. Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 204. Moving beyond the simple grammar of the sentence, Markus Barth argues that “a decision between the two interpretations mentioned cannot be made by quibbling about such trifles as the change of prepositions or the appropriateness of a comma. Rather the whole context and all the parallels of 4:12 provide at least four reasons in favor of the second interpretation [two commas]” (Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapter 4-6* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974], 480). Barth summarizes his position in part by saying, “The task of the special ministers mentioned in Eph 4:11 is to be servants in that ministry is entrusted to the whole church. Their place is not above but below the great number of saints who are adorned by resounding titles. Every one of the special ministers...understands himself as a minister to ministers” (Barth *Ephesians*, 481). Possibly, they could be more accurately called “trainers of trainers” or “equippers of equippers.” For a historical argument against the inclusion of the second comma in Ephesians 4:11, see Robby Gallaty, “The Comma That May Have Kept the Church in a Coma,” in *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus’ Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 117-125.

71. See for example, Nathan Brewer, *The Pulse of Christ: A Fivefold Training Manual*, rev. & exp. ed. (Atlanta: 100 Movements Publishing, 2020); Neil Cole, *Primal Fire: Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014); Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21 Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012); J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

governance of the Church.<sup>72</sup> Though some see in Ephesians a nascent catholicism with an organized ministry and sacraments, C.E. Arnold asserts, “The church [in Ephesians] is still viewed as an organism...and not as an institution. There is no interchurch organization and no established priesthood to mediate the means of grace.... All members are involved in the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12, 16).”<sup>73</sup>

The implication here is that, in the original design of the Church, the onus for disciple making is not laid solely upon the feet of an ordained class of clergy or even lay officers (elders and deacons). Instead, all members of the Body are included in this task by virtue of their particular gifting and the general call upon all believers to make other disciples. With prophetic

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72. Following John Calvin, a majority of Presbyterians in the West have continued to embrace “cessationism,” the idea that most of the gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the NT ceased in operation after the founding of the early Church. Though Calvin acknowledged God’s occasional use of apostles, prophets and evangelists for renewal of the Body, these were not “ordinary” offices. Of the five functions listed in Ephesians 4:11, only pastors and teachers were indispensable for the life of the Church: “Those who preside over the government of the church in accordance with Christ’s institution are called by Paul as follows: first apostles, then prophets, thirdly evangelists, fourthly pastors and finally teachers [Ephesians 4:11]. Of these only the last two have an ordinary office in the church; the Lord raised up the first three at the beginning of his Kingdom, and now and again revives them as the need of the time demands.... These three functions were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before.... I do not deny that the Lord has sometimes at a later period raised up apostles or at least evangelists in their place as has happened in our own day. For there was need for such persons to lead the church back from the rebellion of Anti-christ. Nonetheless, I call [these offices] ‘extraordinary,’ because in duly constituted churches [they have] no place. Next come pastors and teachers, whom the church never can be without. There is, I believe this difference between them: teachers are not put in charge of discipline, or administering the sacraments, or warnings and exhortations, but only of Scriptural interpretation – to keep doctrine whole and pure among believers. But the pastoral office includes all these functions within itself” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.4. “Of Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office” [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970], 1056-1057). Calvin taught that there are four offices (or orders) within the government of the Church. The opening lines of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541 read, “There are four orders of office instituted by our Lord for the government of his church. First, pastors; then doctors; next elders; and fourth deacons. Hence if we will have a church well-ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of government” (John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. by J. K. S Reid, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 58.

73. C. E. Arnold, “Letter to the Ephesians,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 248. I. Howard Marshall also challenges the presence of “early catholic” elements in New Testament writings in “Early Catholicism,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 217-231. See also E. Kasemann, “The Theological Problem Presented by the Motif of the Body of Christ,” in *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 102-121; and “Paul and Early Catholicism,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 236-251. For a discussion of early church leadership and ecclesiology, see Ralph P. Martin, “Early Catholicism,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 223-225.

anticipation, Markus Barth comments in 1974 on the consumerism that would grip the Church in the West if the historic division between the ministry of clergy and lay is perpetuated:

Eph 4:12 may indeed underline the fact that the “saints” are not a part of the church but are all her members, without excluding any one of them. All the saints (and among them, each saint) are enabled by the four or five types of servants enumerated in 4:11 to fulfill the ministry given to them, so that the whole church is taken into Christ’s service and given missionary substance, purpose, and structure. This interpretation challenges both the aristocratic-clerical and the triumphalistic-ecclesiastical exposition of 4:11-12.... Indeed, the traditional distinction between clergy and laity does not belong to the church. Rather, the whole church, the community of all the saints together, is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world. This way two widespread opinions are refuted: the assumption that the bulk of the church members are reduced to the rank of mere consumers of spiritual gifts, and the notion that the church as a whole must strive primarily for a “build-up” which benefits only herself.<sup>74</sup>

In place of this, Barth casts a vision based on Ephesians 4:11-12 of an every-member, “equipping” culture for ministry in place of the “delivery” culture that is so prevalent among historic Protestant Churches in the West. “As an alternative the following message is conveyed: the dignity and usefulness of the special ministries given to the church are as great or as small as their effectiveness in making every church member, including the smallest and most despised, an evangelist in his own home and environment.”<sup>75</sup>

In summary, there is an increasing recognition that much of the Church in the West, including particularly Reformed Protestantism, has wedded itself to an information transfer/classroom method of disciple making that is neither reflective of the NT and early Church model of discipleship nor especially effective in its approach. Over the last few decades, a number of writers on Christian discipleship have been calling the Church to return to a more

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74. Barth *Ephesians*, 479.

75. Barth *Ephesians*, 479-480.

Scriptural form of disciple making that is intent on replicating the rabbi/disciple relationship and its different analogous forms up to the pre-Nicene early Church.<sup>76</sup>

There has also been a growing awareness that the NT and early Church models of congregational leadership are much more fluid than traditionally considered, including the presence of functions within the Church that have long been deemphasized or ignored (i.e., the apostolic, prophetic and teaching functions). The result has been a shift in recognition that the call to disciple making belongs not merely to an ordained class of clerical and lay leaders but to the entire Body of Christ which includes a variety of persons who are especially gifted for this equipping task. This change has in turn added to the question of whether the current overall approach to Church life and ministry in the West is still conducive to the disciple-making process. In other words, should not the function of the Church (disciple making) dictate its form? This question shall be considered next.

### **Shifts in Culture and the Church: From Attractional to Missional**

A third set of shifts to consider relates to the rapid displacement of the Church in North America from the center of Western culture's life. Recognizing both the opportunity and the peril to be found in this challenge, about seventy years ago scholarly voices from Western contexts outside of North America began speaking to the Church, calling it back to its biblical roots as a missional movement and re-examining some traditional ecclesiastical forms that have

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76. See Francis Chan, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishers, 2012); Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, *The Disciplemaker's Handbook: 7 Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990); and Ralph Moore, *Making Disciples: Developing Lifelong Followers of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012). The Bonhoeffer Project, led by Bill Hull (<https://thebonhoefferproject.com>), and Discipleship.org, founded by Bobby Harrington (<https://discipleship.org>), are examples of Christian evangelical organizations that are dedicated to reviving the art of discipleship in North American Churches.

arisen in the past in response to certain Western cultural assumptions.<sup>77</sup> Among these assumptions is the notion that the Church is integrally important to a virtuous society and that most citizens are aware, involved or at least acquiescent to this privileged position. Assumptions such as this are now rapidly waning in various degrees across the Western world. However, the Church has been seemingly slow in recognizing this phenomenon.

Building upon the somewhat theoretical insights of these missional thinkers, in recent decades more and more Christian practitioners have begun to experiment with and apply these scholarly ideas in a variety of contexts. The result has been a growing body of experience with alternative forms of congregational life that many believe are more faithful to the biblical witness and more fruitful for disciple making and community impact in the current cultural milieu. Could it be that some of these ways of “doing church” are indeed appropriate and applicable in the life of a historic, Reformed congregation like FPC? The purpose in part of this thesis-project is to answer this question, but in order to do so a degree of biblical and historical background is necessary, once again, in order to form a theologically informed framework for mission and ministry.

The second shift in this chapter noted the manner in which Jesus, Paul and the Ante-Nicene Church formed disciples. In all three cases, they used a relational approach that relied upon mentoring as much or more than the transfer of doctrinal information. This third section will begin by exploring the overall ecclesial context in which these early Church disciples were made, arguing that, in every case, followers of Jesus were trained to live together and do mission

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77. Some scholars date the first of these clarion calls from the publication of Lesslie Newbigin’s 1952 Kerr Lectures at Trinity College, Glasgow, Scotland as *The Household of God: Lectures in the Nature of the Church*. Another early voice was that of Dutch South African missiologist David Bosch. Translated into multiple languages, his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* was considered to be the basic academic text for the study of mission in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

as family. The section will then conclude with a discussion of two contemporary approaches to congregational life: the attractional church and missional church models.

After Jesus was expelled from his hometown of Nazareth, he went to the home of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum and established their extended family household (Gk. *oikos*) as home base for engaging in mission and ministry.<sup>78</sup> There he ate with and equipped the disciples he gathered around him, sending them out to do mission in the community.<sup>79</sup> Eventually, as the circle of his trained followers increased, Jesus would send them out to find people who were open to his message.<sup>80</sup>

Though there are some notable episodes involving Jesus and the Temple in Jerusalem and apparently early on in his ministry he was able to maintain a habit of teaching in the synagogues, the vast amount of material in the Gospels posits Jesus, literally and metaphorically, outside the confines of the religious facilities of his day.<sup>81</sup> More often than not he could be found teaching

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78. See Luke 4:14-30; Matthew 4:13; Mark 1:29.

Regarding *oikos*, in the NT it can refer to a literal house, that is, to any dwelling place including a home, an inhabited house or to a building (e.g., Matthew 2:11; 7:24-27; 9:7; Mark 7:30) or more metaphorically to an extended household or family (e.g., Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; John 4:53; 1 Corinthians 1:16, 16:15; 2 Timothy 1:16, 4:19). For these and other less frequent uses of *oikos* see BADG, 560-561. For the organization and makeup of Greco-Roman households including multi-generational family members and slaves, see Craig S. Keener, “Family and Household,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig S. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 353-368. Mike Breen and Sally Breen write that the *oikos* of the ancient world was “a relational network of blood and non-blood relationships, natural family along with friends, neighbors and work relationships” (Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 37).

“Jesus began at a very early period of His ministry to gather round Him a company of disciples, with a view to the preparation of an agency for carrying out the work of the divine kingdom. The two pairs of brothers received their call at the commencement of the first Galilean ministry, in which the first act was the selection of Capernaum by the seaside as the center of operations and ordinary place of abode” (A.B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* [Lexington, KY: Readaclassic Publications, 2017], 15).

79. “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14; cf. Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13). For Jesus’ instruction when sending the twelve, see Matthew 10:3-42; Mark 6:17-13; Luke 9:1-6.

80. Luke 10:1-24.

81. Notable episodes at the Temple: Matthew 21:12, 14, 23; Mark 11:11, 15, 27; 12:35; Luke 19:45; 22:53; John 2:14; 5:14; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20; 10:23; 18:20. Examples of teaching in the synagogues: Matthew 9:35; Mark 1:21,

and healing in the open air among the crowds and interacting in more intimate settings with his twelve disciples and a larger entourage which apparently included a number of women.<sup>82</sup>

After his resurrection, Jesus' followers maintained the rhythm of life that he modeled for them. The consummate picture of the NT Church in Acts 2:42-46 vividly displays this pattern of worship, fellowship and mission:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [*worship*] and to fellowship [*fellowship*], to the breaking of bread and to prayer [*worship/fellowship*]. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles [*mission*]. All the believers were together and had everything in common [*fellowship*]. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need [*mission*]. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts [*worship*]. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts [*fellowship*], praising God [*worship*] and enjoying the favor of all the people [*mission*]. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.<sup>83</sup>

The passage ends in verse 47 with Luke's commentary that as the early Church did life together and ministered to one another as an extended "family on mission" their numbers increased.<sup>84</sup>

Although there is some mention of larger meetings in the Temple court and in synagogues after the resurrection of Jesus, early Church scholars like Roger Gehring assert that the overwhelming evidence is that the infant Church met in small gatherings in the homes of believers and not in special buildings constructed for Christian gatherings.<sup>85</sup> Others like Phillip

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6:2; Luke 4:15-33; John. 6:59. Apparently as Jesus succeeded in aggravating practically all of the religious leaders around him, he became less and less welcome in the synagogues.

82. "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3; cf. Mark 15:40-41).

83. Acts 2:42-47.

84. Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 10.

85. "On one point nearly all NT scholars presently agree: early Christians met almost exclusively in homes. For nearly three hundred years – until the fourth century, when Constantine began building the first basilicas throughout the Roman Empire – Christians gathered in private homes built initially for domestic use, not in church

Sell contrast the internal dynamics of early Church life with later Christendom era congregational forms:

These house churches, by virtue of their residential location and small size, provided a more intimate, participatory, and dialogical setting than Christendom's large basilicas that were configured with people sitting in rows, facing toward the priest at the altar or pastor at the pulpit. The lived experience in the New Testament house church was very different from what emerged during Christendom. First, the scale of relationships was much smaller. Second, the house church had fewer relationships which fostered depth, participation, intimacy and interaction. This contrast in experiences between pre-Christendom and Christendom churches has been largely ignored by scholars of the Bible, theology, and the practice of ministry.<sup>86</sup>

Sell also notes that the many “one another” passages, and the range of activities associated with them, are further indicators of a rich community experience within the NT Church:

Within the house church, everyone was expected to contribute in some manner to the house church gathering (1 Cor. 14:26). Practicing the “one anotherings” of the New Testament found expression in these small-scale, interactive gatherings (Heb. 10:24-25). All of these “one anotherings” are reciprocal in nature and presuppose some knowledge of the other person.... These practices flow easily in house church settings but are nearly impossible to practice in large gatherings of the Christendom-structured worship services.... When we envision the church during the New Testament era, it is more

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buildings originally constructed for the sole purpose of public worship” (Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004], 1). Referring to the term *ekklesia*, Robert Banks notes, “Never during this period is the term applied to the building in which Christians meet. Whether we are considering the smaller gatherings of only some Christians in a city or the larger meetings involving the whole Christian population, it is in the home of one of the believers that *ekklesia* is held – for example in the ‘upper room’ (Acts 1:13). Not until the third century do we have evidence of special buildings being constructed for Christian gatherings and, even then, they were modelled on the room into which guests were received in the typical Roman and Greek household” (Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, second ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 41. Some of the direct biblical references to believers gathered in homes are in Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15.

86. Phillip W. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church: Pastoral Realities of Post-Christendom,” in *Missional Disciple-Making: Disciple-Making for the Purpose of Mission*, ed. Michael J. Breen and David Gustafson (Pawley’s Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2019), 143. Robert Banks highlights the relational dynamics within these groups caused by the physical limitations of the meeting spaces: “This put a limit on the numbers involved. The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably.... This would compare with the number of people who belonged to a voluntary association. Even the meetings of the ‘whole church’ were small enough for a relatively intimate relationships to develop between the members. So long as they preserved their household setting, this was bound to be the case” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 41-42).

appropriate to think of it as a network of house churches than to envision it as a large and singular location.<sup>87</sup>

The picture formed here is of a dynamic discipleship movement, based in the intimate yet inviting context of the *oikos*, and focused on sharing with others the good news these early believers had heard and experienced in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul had trained these disciples to follow Jesus as family. It is clear that the post-resurrection believers were relating to one another in much the same fashion as Jesus has instructed.

Because of the abundance of familial language and terms, Robert Banks claims that the most significant metaphor the Apostle Paul uses for early Church communities is that of “family.”<sup>88</sup> Mike Breen and Sally Breen call these early Church gatherings “family on mission.”<sup>89</sup> This movement was not structured around nor dependent upon dedicated buildings or

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87. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church,” 144. For the many “one anothering” passages to which Sell refers, see Mark 9:50; John 13:14; 34, 35; 15:12, 17, Romans 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13; 15:7, 14; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 11:33; 12:25; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; Galatians 5:13, 15, 26; 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 32; 5:19, 21; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 18: 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24, 25; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Peter 3:8; 4:8, 9, 10; 5:5, 14; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7; 11, 12; 2 John 5.

88. “So numerous are these, and so frequently do they appear, that the comparison of the Christian community with ‘family’ must be regarded as the most significant and metaphorical usage of all” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 53). “The metaphor of the family was a vital one to Paul. Paralleling the household context of community gatherings, we have the use of household language to describe the relations between members. The correlation of the two may be accidental to Paul. Christians may not have had anywhere else to meet, especially since the synagogues soon became closed to them, and the rooms attached to local temples would have possessed unsavory connotations. But just possibly the practical necessity for their use blended with a further, theologically based consideration. For given the family character of the Christian movement, the homes of its members provided the most conducive atmosphere in which they could give expression to the bond they had in common” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 60-61). Examples of familial language in Paul include “my child” (Philemon 10), “our brother” (1 Thessalonians 3:33, 2 Corinthians 1:1); “our sister” (Philemon 2); “his mother and mine” (Romans 16:13); “father” (1 Corinthians 4:14-15). The term *adelphoi* (bretheren) is Paul’s favorite way of referring to those to whom he is writing (Galatians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 9:3, 5; Col. 1:2; 4:15). Surely, Paul assumed this language from the model of Jesus and his followers: “(Jesus) replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matthew 12:48-50).

89. “We see Paul eventually moving to a strategy of planting the gospel directly in the Greco-Roman *oikos*, bypassing entirely the traditional religious structure of the synagogue. We don’t find descriptions of a biological family, but we do see many people in his family on mission.... Paul trained households to live as families on mission” (Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 34).

public worship services.<sup>90</sup> Nor was there an ordained class of clergy to lead them.<sup>91</sup> Though there was some differentiation within the family based upon spiritual gifting, none of these functions are given a formal structure and no one derived their authority from an “ordination.”<sup>92</sup>

After the close of the New Testament era, the early Church slowly emerged into the Roman Empire as a grassroots movement, devoid of power and persecuted. Without church buildings, public worship services and paid staff, the early Christians continued to meet mostly in homes and functioned as extended spiritual families, supporting and caring for one another’s needs, reaching out in love to their neighbors, and starting new communities of disciples wherever they went.<sup>93</sup> By ministering to their communities and relating to one another in this

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90. “One of the most puzzling features of Paul’s understanding of *ekklesia* for his contemporaries, whether Jew or Gentile, must have been his failure to say that a person went to church primarily to ‘worship.’ Not once in all his writings does he suggest this is the case. Indeed, it could not be, for he held a view of ‘worship’ that prevented him from doing so.... ‘Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will’ (Rom. 12:1-2). So worship involves the whole of one’s life, every word and action, and knows no special place or time.... Since all places and times have now become the venue of worship, Paul cannot speak of Christians assembling in church *distinctively* for this purpose.... The purpose of church is rather the edification of its members through their God-given ministry to one another (1 Cor. 14:12, 19, 26)” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 91-93).

91. “Although Paul uses the language of priesthood, priestly service and priestly cult, he never refers to a particular caste, activity or object of a sacred kind. Instead the individual believer, the community as a whole or the secular authorities are ‘priests’ in his sense.... Faith, love and the total dedication of one’s life are for him the ‘priestly actions’ that God now requires to be performed. This means that within the church, distinctions between priest and layman, mediatorial and common service, cultic ritual and secular activity do not and cannot exist...in Paul’s official priesthood, which exists to mediate between God and man, is shared by the whole community and never by any one member or group as distinct from others. Here we have a common priesthood, with no distinction between clergy and lay” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 132-133).

92. “In none of these [Pauline] passages do we find Paul suggesting that people have undergone ordination of any kind to the ministries they fulfil.... Hands were then laid upon them as a tangible sign of fellowship and prayer, not as a mechanism for the creation of a ministry or imparting of special grace” (Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 149).

93. “Most improbable of all, the churches did not use their worship services to attract new people. In the aftermath of the persecution of Nero in AD 68, churches around the empire – at varying speeds in varying places - closed their doors to outsiders.... Worship services were to glorify God and edify the faithful, not to evangelize outsiders” (Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 11). Also, “It was not Christian worship that attracted outsiders; it was Christians who attracted them, and outsiders found the Christians attractive because of their Christian habitus, which catechesis and worship had formed.... During the early centuries Christians met and worshipped in private buildings, not public ones; they met in houses, not in basilicas or temples.... The worship of

way, the Christian movement grew to encapsulate around half the Roman Empire in about three hundred years.<sup>94</sup> Alan Kreider characterizes this slow, persistent, bottom-up growth as a “patient ferment.”<sup>95</sup>

The Church’s relationship with the culture around it changed dramatically, however, when the Roman Emperor Constantine announced the *Edict of Milan* (313AD).<sup>96</sup> This statement granted Christians tolerance and increasingly welcomed the Church into a place of privilege in the empire. Historians and theologians call this the “Constantinian shift.” After that time, and until the last fifty years or so, the Church began to enjoy a central place in Western Culture.<sup>97</sup>

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Christians was secret, closed to outsiders. Christian worship was for Christians, not for curious connoisseurs of cult or even tentative inquirers” (Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 135-136).

Michael Green notes, “One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes.... The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality, which must often have gone with it, all helped to make this form of evangelism particularly successful” (Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 318). Commenting on the modern association between evangelism and large public meetings, Green informs his readers that even if such meetings were desirable they were impossible because of the political milieu in which the Church came into existence: “Large-scale public associations were banned by imperial edict during most of [this] period.... It was always impolitic, and potentially dangerous to organize a large public meeting: this was to invite police action. Naturally, therefore, the emphases lay on home and personal evangelism” (387).

94. Rodney Stark estimates the growth rate of the early church in *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 4-13. He attributes the growth of the church in part to its ability to create a strong sense of belonging: “Christianity did not grow because of miracle working in the marketplaces (although there may have been much of that going on), or because Constantine said it should or even because the martyrs gave it such credibility. It grew because Christianity constituted an intense community able to generate the ‘invincible obstinacy’ that so offended the younger Pliny but yielded intense religious rewards. And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the ‘good news’” (Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 208).

95. “The patient God was at work.... God used not influential or powerful people but obscure fishermen and hunters to achieve a huge end.... [The growth of the church during this period] was brewing, but not under anyone’s control. It was uncoordinated, it was unpredictable, and it seemed unstoppable.... The churches grew in many places, taking varied forms. They proliferated because the faith that these fishers and hunters embodied was attractive to people who were dissatisfied with their old cultural and religious habits, who felt pushed to explore new possibilities, and who then encountered Christians who embodied a new manner of life that pulled them toward what the Christians called ‘rebirth’ into new life. Surprisingly, this happened in a patient manner” (Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 12).

96. The Christian faith did not become the official religion of the Roman Empire until 380AD when the emperor Theodosius issued the *Edict of Thessalonica*.

97. Western culture refers to the social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief and socio-political systems that originated in Europe. Western culture also applies to countries whose histories are strongly connected

One dramatic piece of evidence of this trend is the construction of impressive cathedrals around pilgrimage sites throughout Western Europe during the High and Late Middle Ages. With the coming of the cathedrals, another change in church form began to occur—from the outreach of the small village parish to the “in reach” of the event-driven cathedral.<sup>98</sup> Mike Breen and Alex Absalom describe a change in mindset that began to occur among the populace:

Over time, the pilgrims went to the cathedral and wanted the cathedral experience in their home churches every Sunday. They saw the choirs, the orchestras, the smoke, the light pouring through the giant stained glass windows, walls painted with scenes from Scripture, gorgeous tapestries, listening to the famous bishop preaching...they saw that,...and went back to their local parish church...[asking], Couldn't we have [all these things], too?<sup>99</sup>

Breen affirms that, originally, both the cathedral and village mission church were complementary and effective church forms, such that eventually Christian beliefs and values became normative throughout Europe, though not everyone, of course, personally adhered to them.<sup>100</sup> Scholars use the term “Christendom” to describe this era when the Church prevailed over Western culture. However, with the ascendency of the Church, an unintended consequence started to assert itself: a misunderstanding developed concerning the purpose of the cathedral and that of the local parish mission:

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to Europe by immigration, colonization, or influence. There countries include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

98. These small churches were the products of the Roman parish system and Celtic monastic missionary strategies. For an assessment of the Synod of Whitby (644AD) and the complex missionary strategies in the British Isles during the Early Middle Ages, see John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1998).

99. Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Pawley's Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2015), 53.

100. “The small village missions that people attended locally were pioneering the missional frontiers and discipling people and reaching into un-evangelized villages. At the same time, people were connected to a cathedral where, every once in a while, everyone gathered and saw just how big and glorious the Kingdom of God was. Where these models worked in tandem together, they evangelized the whole of Europe. The combination of a missional, sending center (the cathedral) and the smaller, missional outpost won the day” (Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 51).

Over time, the local parish missions became mini-cathedrals (or at least the best they could). But when they did that, they lost the powerful missional engine into the local context and, consequently, the ability to disciple people. Before this transition, more focus was on the time outside Sunday, whereas this made Sunday the most important day of the week. Community church life became completely about the service. When the Sunday service becomes the center of discipleship and the service is geared more around watching and consuming (which is almost impossible not to do when it's geared around a “big show”), discipleship becomes really hard. How can one do 1 Corinthians 11-14 in a community like that?<sup>101</sup>

As the Church increasingly established itself as a pillar of Western society, in some ways it became an end unto itself. The Church began to function in a way that assumed people would come to it instead of living as extended missionary families that lived in and for the neighborhoods, villages and cities around it. Church became a place instead of a movement. Indeed, the Church still engaged in mission activities, but these became more of a program or a ministry of the Church rather than its *raison d'etre*. Written during an age when the Church had become firmly ensconced in Western culture, the Protestant Reformation “Marks of the Church” required a Sunday morning service to provide a place to encounter these indicators of authenticity and an ordained pastor or priest to administer them.<sup>102</sup> In response in the centuries that followed, monastic orders, denominational mission agencies, para-church organizations,

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101. Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 52.

102. Lutherans and the Reformed both agreed the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments were necessary indicators of the true Church. Following Calvin’s lead (“Letter to Cardinal Sadoleto” [1539] and Book IV.12:1-13 in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*), the Reformed added right discipline as another mark. So, for example, see chapter 18 of *The Scottish Confession of Faith* (1560) entitled, “Of the Notes by Which the True Kirk is Discerned from the False and Who Shall be Judge of the Doctrine”: “The notes, therefore, of the true kirk of God we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the word of God, into the which God has revealed himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles do declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts; (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42; Jn 10:27; 18:37; 1 Cor. 1:13; Mt. 18:19-20; Mk 16:15-16; 1 Cor. 11:24-26; Rom. 4:11.) Lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished. (Mt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:4-5.).”

For an evaluation of the Reformation inspired marks of the church, see Allan Hirsch and Jessie Cruickshank, *Activating 5Q: A User’s Guide* (Sterlingshire, England, 100M, 2018), 60. As an example of their critique: “It’s what’s left out of the Protestant marks that really matters.... Whatever happened to a metrics defined by concrete expressions of love, discipleship, evangelism, mission, service, worship or community?... By tying the sacraments to formal gatherings to be conducted only by ordained clergy we have effectively ‘institutionalized grace’ and locked it up in a stained-glass institution” (Hirsch and Cruickshank, *Activating 5Q*, 60).

Christian non-profits and networks assumed more and more of the apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic impulses of the Church. Presbyterian missiologist and founder of the Center for World Mission, Ralph D. Winter, termed these missionary forms of the Church “sodalities” while calling the more settled congregational forms “modalities.”<sup>103</sup>

For the most part, the Christendom understanding of the relationship between the Church, culture and mission continues to be predominate in North America today, and this includes, of course, those congregations which trace their theological inheritance back to the Reformed Protestant tradition. Dick Wiedenheft, in his *The Meaning of Missional*, notes,

Many local churches...perceive themselves, along with other churches, to be the locus and center of what God is doing in their community. Their emphasis is often on their building and what takes place within it, particularly their worship services. When making decisions, they tend to do what is best for those already in the church, rather than for those on the outside. They frequently equate ministry with volunteering in the recognized programs and service of the church.<sup>104</sup>

Wiedenheft and others commonly call the contemporary expression of the Christendom model the “attributional church.” This way of leading and organizing the Church came to the fore in the 1980s with the proliferation of ideas from the Church Growth Movement.<sup>105</sup> Starting in the

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103. See Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, fourth edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2009), 244-252. After returning from the mission field in Guatemala, Winter founded the U.S. Center for World Mission, William Carey University and the popular Perspectives Course on world missions.

104. Wiedenheft, *The Meaning of Missional*, 52.

105. The origins of the Church Growth Movement can be traced to the 1955 publication of Donald McGavran's book *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (1955; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) in which he demonstrates that the traditional Western use of international “mission stations” is largely ineffective for evangelism and discipleship. Using statistics and sociological analysis, leaders in the movement tried to apply their insights from international mission to the North American mission field, asking “How can we reach people groups in the USA?” Though the movement’s intentions were good, Ed Stetzer says that the movement produced another kind of mission station mentality, that of the attributional church. When the church became an attractive place for people to discover Jesus, the unintended consequence was the creation of a “warehousing effect” that lures people to “come and see” and then “do life” at church seven days a week (Ed Stetzer, “What’s the Deal w/ the Church Growth Movement? Part 2: Some Unfortunate Evolutions,” Christianity Today, posted October 8, 2012, accessed September 16, 2020, [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/october/whats-deal-w-church-growth-movement-part-2-some.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/october/whats-deal-w-church-growth-movement-part-2-some.html)). Continuing his critique, Stetzer says of the movement: “The church can never become

1960s and 1970s, national church leaders began to detect declining trends in church attendance and other measurables, and in response they began to apply a variety of marketing principles and secular management techniques to stem the tide.

The attractional church form can be alliterated with four “P’s”.<sup>106</sup>

- **Professionals.** Ordained and non-ordained staff are hired to offer religious goods and services to consumers who shop for the best congregation to meet their perceived needs. Volunteers augment the efforts of the professionals. Consumers stay in the congregation as long as their needs are met.
- **Property.** Personal invitations and media advertisements are extended to those who live in the community in the hope that they will come to the church’s campus to hear and experience the ministry of the staff and volunteers. Attendance at events as well as giving and building campaigns are the key matrixes used to determine the success and faithfulness of the church.
- **Programs.** Growth in discipleship occurs when people attend classes and events and hear messages that offer inspiration and information about the Christian faith. For the most

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the place where I live, work, and play. My neighborhood is where real people live. I am not sent by God to a church facility, ever how convenient and impressive it may be. I am sent away from the church gathered to my tribe and household with the Good News of the Gospel. That is where transformational movements take place that engage every man, woman, and child with the Gospel. So, too many in church growth focused on the barn, rather than how we might live on mission among the white fields. When focusing too much on the barn, we sometimes forget that the wheat will not harvest itself.” Other leaders in the movement were C. Peter Wagner and consultants like Lyle E. Schaller. The magazine *Christianity Today* once called Schaller the “dean” of the Church Growth Movement. Schaller wrote 55 books and edited 44 others. Among these are *Growing Plans: Strategies to Increase Your Church’s Membership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); *Looking in the Mirror: Self-Appraisal in the Local Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); *44 Steps Off the Plateau* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993). Other representative titles from this genre of church consulting include Mark Waltz’s *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2005), and Norman Shawchuck and Gustave Rath, *Benchmarks of Quality in the Church: 21 Ways to Continuously Improve the Content of Your Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

106. These four “P’s” are the product of this researcher’s collaborative participation in a number of missional discipleship coaching calls led by Rev. Chad Pullins. These calls include a small cohort of other staff and lay leaders at FPC.

part, these programs have starting and ending dates. Participants can enjoy these events and then decide whether they will allow the information to apply to their lives. There are few mechanisms for personal accountability. Mission comes in the form of events on or off campus that are organized by staff and volunteers. Members might sign-up online, show up for the day to pack or serve meals and then go home having been satisfied that they have been “missional.”

- **Polish.** In order to compete with other church and entertainment options, attractional churches work hard to offer professionally scripted, inspirational worship services and occasional special events and concerts. Attractional churches seek “excellence” in all they do and offer. An example of this could be paid members of the choir.

All of these “P’s” operate under the assumption that the people who live around a congregation will be drawn to the church’s property because of the outstanding professionals and polished programs it provides. But there are a number of problems with the attractional model:

- It only works if there is no significant cultural barrier to cross when moving from outside to inside the church. As noted earlier, Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, and, as a result, a growing number of people have no idea why they should come onto a church property other than for a wedding or funeral. Many would say the days of “if you build it, they will come” are rapidly coming to a close in North America.
- The attractional church is self-defeating in that it extracts people from the culture and assimilates them into the church. Most of their friends become other Christians, and this inevitably diminishes their time and ability to speak to those outside of the Church. As a result, people cease to be outward-focused and instead leave the evangelistic work to professionals.

- The model breeds consumerism. A 2016 Pew Research Center study revealed that North Americans overwhelmingly view the church as a vendor of religious goods and services primarily existing in order to serve its members.<sup>107</sup> The well-known 80/20 rule becomes increasingly operative: 80% or more of the congregation becomes fruit consumers while 20% (staff and volunteers) try to feed them.<sup>108</sup>
- Pastors are the professionals who are hired to meet the needs of members and to develop strategies and initiatives that will grow the church. Faithful members are expected to identify and bring in prospective customers. The more programs and amenities the church has, the more value it has to offer. Success is measured more by numerical rather than spiritual growth.
- The model centers the church's mission on the institutional growth and maintenance of the church itself rather than on what God is doing in the world.

By following this model, some larger congregations have been able to grow due to the fact that they are able to muster the resources needed to out-compete smaller churches and other entertainment and recreational options. However, the vast majority of their membership growth

107. In a 2016 study, the Pew Research Center gives the top things Americans look for when deciding upon a church home: "Fully 83% of Americans who have looked for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of congregation. Nearly as many (79%) say it was important to feel welcomed by clergy and lay leaders, and about three-quarters (74%) say the style of worship services influenced their decision about which congregation to join. Location also factored prominently in many people's choice of congregation (70%), with seven-in-ten saying it was an important factor. Smaller numbers cite the quality of children's programs (56%), having friends or family in the congregation or the availability of volunteering opportunities as key to their decision" ("Choosing a New Church or House of Worship," Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship](http://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship)).

108. Mike Breen says, "If we have churches with warm, cozy, comfortable, inviting environments, *someone is paying the price to make sure this happens*. That means for all of the invitation that is offered to a large portion of the people in a church, there is another group that is shouldering all of the expectations and challenge of producing that kind of atmosphere: Church leaders. Pastors. Elders. Deacons. Board members. Volunteers. Whatever your church has. Usually 15-20% of the people are doing almost all the work.... These people are constantly discouraged, frustrated and stressed. Burnout is normal. There is a high degree of turnover" (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 16-17).

is due to transfers from other churches. This is a startling phenomenon given the increased number of non-believers (“nones”) and post-Christians all around these congregations.

All in all, the attractional model has not worked to stem the decline of the West. Even the Willow Creek Church in South Barrington, Illinois, the epitome of the attractional model in North America, came to the conclusion that increased attendance to ministry programs did not produce a concomitant increase spiritual growth.<sup>109</sup> As noted in chapter one, every current measurable indicator of the general health shows a continued decline in congregational vitality and impact. Many observers now believe that most congregations are no longer calibrated to reach the world around them.

So how did the Church get to this place in Western Culture? When Lesslie Newbigin returned to England in 1974 after serving for forty years in India, he saw that his own country had become a mission field. Many of the old assumptions about God, Jesus, sin, salvation and the authority of Scripture were no longer held as plausible by the majority of Britons. The dominant Christian culture in the UK had been replaced by what is called “post-Constantianism” or “post-Christendom.” These terms refer to the cultural shift in Western society where the Church has lost its privileged cultural position and must now compete with a wide variety of alternative worldviews such as secularism, nationalism, environmentalism and militant atheism along with other religious systems.

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109. In 2007 Willow Creek produced a report, *Reveal: Where are You?* that showed though new Christians did tend to benefit from the church’s programs, the majority of its spiritually mature members were “stalled” in their spiritual growth. Before the research, Willow Creek’s leadership assumed that “the more a person far from God participates in church activities, the more likely it is those activities will produce a person who loves God and loves others.” This assumption was found to be invalid by the research: “Does increased attendance in ministry programs automatically equate to spiritual growth? To be brutally honest: it does not” (Russ Rainey, “Summary of the Willow Creek *REVEAL Study*,” accessed March 3, 2020, [www.christiancoachingcenter.org/index.php/russ-rainey/coachingchurch2](http://www.christiancoachingcenter.org/index.php/russ-rainey/coachingchurch2)). The study shows that it is hard to change consumers into disciples when they are first appealed to as consumers. For an in-depth analysis of the results of the study, see David Fitch, “What Willowcreek’s ‘REVEAL’ Reveals: On Just How Difficult (Impossible?) it is for the MegaChurch to Undergo Change,” posted November 14, 2007, accessed March 5, 2020, [www.missioalliance.org/what-willowcreeks-reveal-reveals-on-just-how-difficult-impossible-it-is-for-the-megachurch-to-undergo-change](http://www.missioalliance.org/what-willowcreeks-reveal-reveals-on-just-how-difficult-impossible-it-is-for-the-megachurch-to-undergo-change)).

The philosophical mood that covers many of these trends is called “postmodernism.”

Among other things, postmodernism rejects the idea that there is one “meta-narrative” like the Christian story that can serve as an overarching explanation of all truth claims. However, it does encourage the pursuit of authentic humanity in community.

In light of this shift, Newbigin began to urge the Church in the West to recover its NT and early Church missionary roots and to apply a cross-cultural missionary approach to sharing the Gospel.<sup>110</sup> In the years that followed, other theologians and missiologists like David Bosch and Darrell Guder began to write and speak in a similar vein, asking the Church to reconsider its role as societal chaplain and recover its missional calling to the culture around it.<sup>111</sup> Scholars commonly call this new paradigm the “Missional Church.”

In order to respond to the Church’s new cultural context, missional church leaders assert that the Church must move toward embracing what could be called the “Missional Marks of the Church.” First, the Church in North America must recognize that it cannot continue to operate as if it is still at the center of culture. Tim Keller says that the Church can no longer expect American society to form people with basic Christian beliefs and then deliver them to the Church via social pressure and custom.<sup>112</sup> Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren warn against the false and seductive lure of Church as a “safe place” and call her instead to be a missional movement in this strange, new context:

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110. “We must say bluntly that when the Church ceases to be a mission, then she openly denies the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament. Apart from actual engagement in the task of being Christ’s ambassador to the world, the name ‘priests and kings unto God’ is but a usurped title” (Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 143).

111. Among these other missional theologians and their works are Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), and Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, and How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009).

112 Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 259.

People go to church looking for words of security, a place of sanctuary. They look for a spiritual enclave, which is only natural, but this is the problem. Churches have chosen to give people what they say they want: a place of danger-free solace, escape, and comfort. But the church is called to be what they really need: a foretaste of God's new creation, a movement of people who change the world, not escape it.... A missional church is formed by people who are starting to own that they are no longer living in a safe place – like Dorothy's Kansas – where the church has a clear position in society and the gospel is a commonly understood message. Just as Dorothy has to learn to navigate Oz differently than Kansas, we too must learn new skills to be missionaries in this new place.<sup>113</sup>

Second, the twenty-first century Church must re-engage the truths of Scripture about the nature of God and recover its early roots as a missional movement. As noted in this chapter, the biblical God is a Triune, sending God who is on mission to restore all of creation from the effects of the Fall. The pinnacle of the Father's mission was the sending of his Son Jesus Christ into the world. Now, the instruments of this mission are Jesus' followers, compelled by the love of God and propelled by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Just as in the pages of the NT, these disciples are now gathered and scattered by God as the Church to engage their communities with the Gospel, and they do this as a family of believers on the move, practicing a rhythm of worship, fellowship and mission and looking for God's activity in their local setting. These disciples replicate themselves in the lives of others by equipping a few at a time to live the life of Jesus. The end result is a disciple-making movement.<sup>114</sup>

Third, the Church should reclaim its calling to be an alternative community in the world. For Keller this means tangibly loving the city in which the congregation is found and working

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113. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 77.

114. Although Roxburgh and Boren say that missional leaders should not try to recreate some pristine or primitive version of the Church ("The early church, as well as the church at a variety of points in history was far from ideal. We don't live in first-century Eurasia" [Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 33]), Breen argues there are *principles and practices* from the biblical witness and early Church age that can be brought forward and approximated for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context. These can guide the Church in its discipleship approach and missional forms (see Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54).

together with other churches and non-profits in calling people to conversion and biblical justice.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, the Church in the West should affirm that every believer is called to live all of life as a missional disciple. Roxburgh and Boren say,

All the church...should live out God's life in the midst of the world; missional people should practice God's life before a watching world. This includes worship, preaching, communion, loving one another, social justice, caring for the poor, and sharing Jesus's gospel. Being missional is about all of it, not part. This is the missional imagination. All of God's people are on mission to engage their surrounding neighborhoods, not just a few who are sent outside the church to do something called missions.<sup>116</sup>

The shift toward a missional model represents a significant change in the way most Western Christians think about the Church. In fact, it is so discontinuous with many traditional ideals that it can seem hard to define. Some try to understand it in terms of what they already know.

Wiedenheft writes about some of the common misconceptions people hold about the missional church: "Becoming missional involves more than adding outreach events to the church calendar. It involves more than starting new evangelism or service ministries. It involves more than going on more mission trips whether locally or abroad."<sup>117</sup>

Rightly understood, the missional church approach is nothing short of revolutionary because it challenges North American Christians to reconsider their lifestyles and to develop a more effective pattern of ministry that calls for an equal amount of attention and resources for the Church Scattered along with the Church Gathered. This new pattern of mission and ministry

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115. Keller, *Center Church*, 260. Similarly, Roxburgh and Boren write, "Throughout the history of the church we discover local communities shaped by practices of life that cause them to stand out and cause others to take heed. They have learned to live as a contrast society shaped by hospitality, radical forgiveness, the breaking down of social and racial barriers, and self-sacrificial love" (Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 105). To this list, this researcher would add the avoidance of sin.

116. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 54.

117. Wiedenheft, *The Meaning of Missional*, 38.

centers around a recovery of biblical *oikos* and it necessitates a change in the way that pastors function from deliverers of ministry to equippers of such.

To summarize this last shift, it can be said that because of the displacement of the Church in the West from the center of culture, there has been a concomitant need to rethink some of the overall ecclesial forms in order to facilitate disciple making. The ascendant ecclesial form among early Christians was the house church movement and the predominant metaphor for the Church was that of “family.” As Western culture proceeded from the Middle Ages to the Reformation period, the cathedral model developed into the aspirational form of the Church and the Protestant “Marks of the Church,” where the Church was defined as a place where clergy offer certain ministry events to the laity, became the hallmark definition of Church faithfulness. The Cathedral model with its impressive buildings and excellent ministry offerings eventually gave rise to the twentieth-century attractional approach to mission and ministry, a methodology that now prevails among almost all larger congregations in the Western Church. The attractional model seemingly is most successful when clergy, staff and program volunteers operate as deliverers of ministry and the covenant partners of the church act as consumers of such.

Because of an increasing awareness of the attractional approach’s failure to provide an effective context for disciple making, a growing number of theorists and practitioners have begun to propose and experiment with various alternative ecclesial models generally termed the “missional church.” The missional church model calls for, among other things, a recovery of *oikos*, a new relationship between congregational leaders and members where the former equip and model missional living for the latter, and a greater sense that members of the Church of Jesus Christ are called to live and do ministry among those they are called to reach, rather than merely

participating in outreach programs to attract them to the church campus where religious professionals can disciple them.<sup>118</sup>

### **Summary: A Theological Framework for Initiating a Missional Discipleship Movement at First Presbyterian Church**

The Church in the West now finds itself in a changing cultural context where, by all appearances, it is having difficulty connecting with an increasing number of people around it. The desire to communicate and embody the Gospel faithfully in a way that it can be impactful in a North American context has led a number of Church leaders over recent decades to search the Scriptures for wisdom and direction. As a result, at least three profound theological shifts are now beginning to shape how the Church thinks about and engages in mission and discipleship.<sup>119</sup>

First, there has been a reclamation of the biblical understanding that God is a missionary God and that mission is not merely a program of the Church but an integral aspect of the very nature of the Triune God (*missio Dei*). As such, it is more correct to say “the mission has a church” rather than “the church has a mission.” This shift speaks to the identity of believers and of the whole Church as God’s sent, pilgrim people who are a royal priesthood participating in his missionary movement to redeem all of creation in the eschaton. This revelation of God as the dynamic initiator of mission and of believers in the Church as active participants in God’s

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118. For a survey of various models for recovering *oikos* in a North American context, see Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011). Examples of specific approaches include Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Pawley’s Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2015); Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); and J.R. Woodward and Dan White, Jr. *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

119. Sacramental theology and pneumatology are also proper aspects of a missional ecclesiology. However, due to the length of this-project, this chapter will not touch on the former and treat the latter only tangentially. Instead, the focus will be on these fundamental building blocks of missional Doctrine of the Church: the Doctrine of God, Christology, and a biblical understanding of discipleship, community and equipping for mission and ministry.

movement to the world argues against the notion that covenant partners are the passive recipients of grace which is meted out by an ordained class of leaders in the Church. It also draws attention to the pattern of mission that God has provided believers in the incarnational sending of the Son. That pattern accentuates the call for disciples of Jesus to “live among” in close proximity to unbelievers rather than merely reaching out to them with the programmatic ministries of a local congregation.

For a historic congregation like FPC that in some ways considers attendance at its worship services as the pinnacle of discipleship and regards mission as a program department of the church, this shift can seem disconcerting because it calls into question many decades of established and unquestioned patterns of leadership, participation and organization. However, the theological heritage of the congregation is also firmly fixed upon a Reformed understanding of the revealed sovereign and active character of the God of the Universe who is intimately involved in the lives of his children and who is steadily moving all of history according to his plan to redeem all things in Christ. As such, this doctrinal resource can be drawn upon to lead the church into a deeper and richer understanding of the nature of God and mission.

Second, there is an increasing interest in recovering Jesus’ and the early Church’s approach to making disciples (*mathetes*). Rather than relying solely upon the information transfer model of the classroom and sanctuary, a missional congregation can begin to return to the disciple-making method of Jesus who brought a group of twelve into a personal relationship with himself for rabbinical-disciple-style mentoring and training. By looking at the ways in which the Apostle Paul and the Ante-Nicene Church adapted Jesus’ fundamental approach to forming his disciples, the Church in the West may begin to approximate this same model,

creating lay-led, disciple-making movements that can assist in reversing the Church's recent trends toward disciple-making ineffectiveness.

Since FPC stands firmly with the historic ethos of the Reformed tradition which emphasizes the "life of the mind in the service of God," applying this second shift which is based on a non-classroom centric model of disciple making will probably be difficult and misunderstood. At the heart of the congregation's discipleship ministry are some nineteen, mostly large, adult Sunday School classes and a Wednesday evening event that draws people to a number of topical and Bible studies each week. As wonderful as the content of these classes is, they have not demonstrated the capacity to equip and inspire covenant partners to multiply other disciples or to reach out with the Gospel into their networks of relationships beyond the confines of the church property.

Thankfully, FPC is also highly committed to the authority of Scripture. In fact, it is this dedication to the Word of God and a belief in its relevancy that has fueled the proliferation of these Bible-based classes over the years. This inherent desire among so many of FPC's congregants to be found faithful to God's Word can be leveraged by the leaders of the church to invite them to look not simply at the content of Scripture but also to the manner in which Jesus, Paul and others in the NT approached the disciple-making process as well. In addition, the import of Ephesians 4:11-12 can be used to create an equipping (*katartismos*) culture of ministry in which pastors, staff and others serve as equippers of ministry and not merely deliverers of the same. The result of this second shift could be a recognition that every believer in the congregation has the potential to be a discipler of others.

Third, there is a growing trend in the West to move beyond an over-reliance upon the Gathered Church, attractional model of church ministry, to a more balanced approach that

includes an equal emphasis on a Scattered Church, missional model. Data suggests that the attractional church philosophy of ministry has failed to stem the tide in decreased attendance and influence, but the majority of congregations in North America still appear to operate under a “feed the consumer” and “if we build it they will come” approach to church growth and discipleship.

Missional scholars and practitioners note that the early Church quietly and, in relatively short order, reached a good majority of the Roman Empire without dedicated buildings for worship. They also contend that the most fruitful context in which disciples were made was in the *oikos*, a relational network of believers who lived and functioned as an extended family on mission and who referred to one another with familial language. Interestingly, the primary purpose for house church gatherings in the NT was never articulated as worship. Rather, these meetings were for the edification of believers by their Spirit-inspired ministry to one another. In the power of the Gospel, these early followers of Jesus lived among and ministered to those around them with love and care, and they created places of authentic human community that at times almost overwhelmed with numbers the rigorous catechumenate process the Church used to disciple new believers.

As a result of the parallels they see between contemporary Western life and the cultural milieu of the NT and early Church, a growing number of national and international missional writers are recommending a recovery of biblical *oikos* as a strategy for reaching the North American context with the Gospel. These authors and practitioners are providing resources to congregational leaders for equipping their covenant partners to lead families on mission in their neighborhoods and to make disciples apart from the campus programs of the church that are organized and led by clergy and staff.

Given that FPC historically has been so identified by its impressive physical presence in downtown Greenville, applying this third shift to the ministry and mission of the congregation will probably be a difficult process. With another building project currently underway, the inertia behind the congregation, unless modified, will most likely be to continue an evangelism strategy that focuses on inviting people to its campus to experience the high-quality worship, preaching and programs the church offers. This ‘cathedralesque’ model of church as a hub for religious activity in the community, combined with the fact FPC is located in the heart of the American South, one of the last remaining vestiges of Christendom in Western Culture where church attendance remains somewhat of a social norm, may represent the most challenging dynamic for a leader who desires to balance the congregation’s ministry with equal attention on the networks of relationships that can be found beyond the church’s property. Taken collectively, with an unconscious assurance based upon the traditional Reformed “Marks of the Church” that church is being properly conducted on its church campus, a mesmerizing effect may take effect where the congregation believes that it is discipling its region even though the demographics of the community and the statistics of the church prove otherwise.

Despite these challenges, FPC does have internal resources that may assist it in this third transition. Though FPC is in many ways a traditional Presbyterian church in the South, which are typically quite staid and reserved, the congregation is marked by a warm, discernible, evangelical feel that manifests itself in a genuine care that people know and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. FPC believes that Jesus matters! It believes in the Gospel! As a result, it frequently is open to novel ideas for evangelizing its community so long as these efforts are rooted in the Gospel and they do not disrupt the current ministry program.

In addition to this, there is a growing sense especially among its younger membership that the heart of the Christian life may involve more than attendance at worship and Sunday School, tithing, volunteering for programmed activities and private devotionals. They, possibly more so than some of the older members of the congregation, also realize the culture around them has changed dramatically even over their shorter life spans and this leads them to believe that alternative strategies for connecting to their non-believing friends are necessary. They want to *live* the Christian life as an alternative to the over-digitized, superficial world around them, and very importantly, they want to do this in community.<sup>120</sup> In order to be shown how to do this, they want to be mentored and equipped in relationships and not simply asked to be a part of a class.

A final resource from which FPC might draw in order to affect this third shift from an attractional to a missional approach to ministry is the high regard it has for its pastors. Given that FPC is such a large congregation, its congregants realize that their pastors' time is a special commodity. This means that a pastor's offer of a mentoring relationship for equipping in mission and ministry will be taken very seriously and that any new ideas he or she may bring in this regard will be received with great consideration as well.

The theological framework formed by the three shifts offer a great deal of assistance in defining a number of key phrases that will be used throughout the remainder of this thesis-project. Given that the mission of the Church is to make disciples and taking into account the

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120. Some authors have noted post-modernism's remarkable desire to find authentic human flourishing in community, especially among younger populations. For example, Stanley J. Grenz writes, "The postmodern world encourages us to recognize the importance of the community.... The next generation are often unimpressed by our verbal presentations of the gospel. What they want to see is a people who live out the gospel in wholesome, authentic, and healing relationships.... A Christian gospel for the postmodern age will invite others to become participants in the community of those whose highest loyalty is to the God revealed in Christ. Participants in the inviting community will seek to draw others to Christ by embodying that gospel in the fellowship they share" (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 168-169). Tim Keller very helpfully reminds the Church that the Gospel creates authentic human community (Keller, *Center Church*, 311).

biblical, historical and theological insights highlighted in this chapter, it can be said that a “missional disciple” is a follower of Jesus who integrates and embodies into their lives a rhythm of worship, fellowship and mission within a family of believers where he or she lives, works and plays and who reproduces the life of Jesus in others. Since the biblical and historic pattern of the Church has been to gather together but also scatter into the community in some way, one may say that a “missional” church is a congregation that consciously organizes itself around God’s mission to the world by regularly gathering together to celebrate God’s greatness and goodness and intentionally scattering as families of believers into their relational networks and neighborhoods to worship, create community and bear witness to the incarnate Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>121</sup> Multiplication is the key for creating movement, so a “missional discipleship multiplication movement” occurs when disciples of Jesus are trained in a way that they are able to equip other disciples without the direct assistance of clergy and staff. Such a movement in which covenant partners are equipped to relationally disciple others into spiritual maturity is at the very heart of a missional church’s ministry culture.

The three shifts noted in this chapter, taken together with an understanding of their context, development and significance, provide a solid, theologically grounded foundation upon which to lead a historic, Reformed, mainline evangelical congregation like FPC forward in aligning its ministry culture around a missional discipleship multiplication movement. These shifts also reveal some of the challenges that will almost certainly be faced and a variety of resources that are already rooted in the church and available for the journey of transformation. Though all three of these shifts may prove to be a source of some degree of confusion and

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121. A number of works are starting to appear on worship within a missional church context including Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014); Mark C. Powers, *Going Full Circle: Worship that Moves us to Discipleship and Missions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013); and Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

disorientation at FPC, they should also serve to place the congregation on a much firmer biblical and theological foundation as it seeks to engage in mission and ministry in its context. Change is hard. It involves grief and misunderstanding. But God’s mission to make disciples from among all nations, including our own, has always been a task worthy of his followers’ best. In fact, it is their only task; because God says that if his people will make disciples, he will build his Church.<sup>122</sup>

Although this chapter has provided a theological framework for understanding and initiating a missional discipleship multiplication movement at FPC, a variety of important questions still remain. These include how the early Church pattern of disciple making in community can be reclaimed and approximated in FPC’s context and what specific role a pastor might play in equipping the congregation to embody these ideas and practices. In addition to these questions, due attention should be given to that fact the pastor who is initiating these changes occupies a “third chair” position in the organization of the church. In chapter three, these and other questions will be treated in light of a range of authors who have considered these matters.

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122. Matthew 16:18. Breen states this strongly: “If you make disciples, you will always get church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples” (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 5). Results from the Willow Creek REVEAL study and the other socio-religious trends cited above seem to bear out Breen’s maxim.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a selective review of literature on the topic of missional church leadership and discipleship and will include writings from an assortment of viewpoints including some from a traditional Reformed mainline perspective so that the reader may understand FPC's particular theological and leadership context. This review is divided into three parts based upon the threefold range of meaning presented in chapter two for the NT use of the word *katartismos* ("equip"). Each part addresses an important body of information about which an associate pastor on the staff of a large historic church should be familiar as he or she leads a congregation forward in its transformational movement toward a more biblically faithful and missionally effective ecclesiology.

The first section reviews authors who each epitomize a variety of approaches related to how the Church should intentionally scatter and gather. Grasping these different models will help the pastor evaluate which approach might be most appropriately adapted to his or her own ministry context. Familiarity with this discussion will also assist the pastor in laying the theological foundations for any newly proposed ecclesiastical forms, especially when the need arises to articulate a potentially unfamiliar rhythm of gathering and scattering to other staff colleagues, leaders and covenant partners in the congregation.

The second section considers what ministry activities an associate pastor should perform in order to initiate and maintain a replicating missional discipleship movement. In most cases, the authors reviewed here will call for the pastor to engage in some type of specialized training in order to prepare missional disciples to make other disciples.

The third section of this review surveys how an associate pastor may serve as an adaptive change agent in the midst of the ministry culture of a historic mainline church. This section includes a review of some of the strategies he or she might use to introduce transformation so that the congregation may be brought into alignment with its own mission and strategy statements and Christ's vision for the Church. Attention is also given here concerning what specific change dynamics might best be used in order to initiate a missional discipleship movement in the life of a church.

### **Laying Ecclesiastical Foundations: Biblically Grounded and Contextually Appropriate**

Chapter two of this thesis-project briefly noted the work of Ralph D. Winter who distinguished two forms of the Church God has used throughout history to bring the Gospel to the nations.<sup>1</sup> Winter used the term “modality” to describe the settled, gathered form of the Church. This form is embodied by the vast majority of traditional congregations throughout Protestantism in the West. The word “sodality” refers to the scattered form of the Church that is most typically expressed in Christian non-profits, missionary agencies, missional communities, house churches, networks and apostolic movements.<sup>2</sup> When Winter first spoke about these forms of the Church, his concern was how the Western Church could engage in effective world

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1. Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2009), 244–252. Winter delivered this address in 1973 at the All-Asia Consultation in Seoul, South Korea.

2. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay elucidate Winter’s terms: “Modalities are mostly concerned with issues related to the life ‘inside’ the church, although they can often be outwardly minded, evangelistic, and generous to mission around the world. This mode of church is highly local in nature and places emphasis on public worship, teaching, shepherding, and discipleship. It’s a ‘first-decision’ environment. All that is required to be involved is that you have made or are moving toward a decision to accept Christ as your Savior.... Whereas modalic structures tend to focus on caring for those already inside the structure, sodalities push toward those on the outside” (Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 128–129).

evangelization. Since that time a number of current authors, recognizing that the West itself is now a mission field, have begun to apply his insights to consider what forms of the Church are needed as she seeks to engage contemporary North American culture with the message of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

In this section of the literature review, various authors will be compared in terms of how each emphasizes, de-emphasizes or hybridizes these modalic and sodalic forms of the Church. Mapping these approaches on a spectrum will help a pastor seeking to lead his or her church in ministry culture transformation to see some of the different ecclesiastical models that are currently at the forefront of discussion in the West. From this vantage point, the pastor may then begin to consider which of these may be most appropriately adaptable for his or her own ministry context.

### **Traditional Reformation Model**

John H. Leith, former long-time professor of theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, was a leading voice in Southern American Presbyterianism in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> His writing epitomizes the traditional, Western Reformed mainline model of the Church as modality with practically no consideration of sodalic forms. In his book *The Church: A Believing Fellowship*, Leith affirms that “in Acts 2:41-47 Luke provides a picture

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3. Winter argues, “The Protestant movement started out by attempting to do without any kind of solidarity structure.... This omission, in my evaluation, represents the greatest error of the Reformation and the greatest weakness of the resulting Protestant tradition.... In failing to exploit the power of sodality, the Protestants had no mechanism for (world) missions for almost 300 years (Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” 250-251). Could it be the reason the Church in the West is struggling to connect with the post-modern culture around it is because, now, the West itself has become a cross-culture mission field and the Church still has no sodalic structures for reaching the neighborhoods and cities around her?

4. John Haddon Leith (1919 –2002) was the Pemberton Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia from 1959 to 1990. He authored at least 18 books and countless essays on Christianity. A towering figure for his time among mainline Southern Presbyterians, Leith is emblematic of the last generation of Protestant leaders before the advent of the last phase of the Christendom era – the Church Growth Movement.

of the church as it ought to be and as the church in the New Testament tried to be.”<sup>5</sup> Focusing on Acts 2 he highlights the early church as a place of “teaching” and of “very close fellowship” which maintained a deep sense of reverence when it gathered: “(the church) is the place where people gather for prayer and for reading and hearing the Word of God; as such it is different than any other place.”<sup>6</sup> Referring to the everyday worship in the Temple courts in Jerusalem, he says that the “early church was a worshipping church.”<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, Leith at no point highlights the fact that the early church continued to meet in homes for the first few centuries of its existence. Rather than exploring the unique and evidently powerful social and relational dynamics of sodalic early house church life, he moves on to write about the Protestant “Marks of the Church” as the way to recognize an authentic Church.<sup>8</sup> Leith assumes that these marks will be displayed primarily in the life of a local, gathered congregation: “The New Testament very clearly calls the local or particular congregation the church. Nowhere else is the church so clearly visible to us as in the life and worship of the local congregation. Here we worship. Here we make our public profession of faith. Here we are baptized. Here we are married.”<sup>9</sup>

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5. John H. Leith, *The Church: A Believing Fellowship* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 15.

6. Leith, *The Church*, 16.

7. Leith, *The Church*, 17. The reader is reminded from chapter two that only the infant Church was able to gather at the Temple for worship before their early ejection. The reader may also be reminded that at no place do the authors of the NT say the Church gathered primarily for worship (see again Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982], 91-93).

8. “The early Protestants taught that the church exists where the Word of God is rightly preached and heard and where the sacraments are rightly administered.... Some Reformed theologians add discipline as a sign of the church. *So the church exists where the Word of God is heard in faith and obeyed in love.* Nothing else is necessary for the church’s existence” (Leith, *The Church*, 21),

9. Leith, *The Church*, 22.

Leith implies that the church is a special, dedicated place where holy events happen.

Although he tries to dissuade his readers from identifying the church with a building, he maintains the assumption that the normative identifier of a local church is a dedicated facility that provides space on Sunday morning for the ministry of at least one ordained pastor.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear whether Leith senses that he himself may have adopted a form of the church that argues against his own belief that the church should not be so strongly associated with a building. He says, “We must continuously remind ourselves that (church) does not mean a building or institution or an organization. It means the people of God.”<sup>11</sup> Could it be the reason leaders and covenant partners may need to be reminded that the church is not the building is because the traditional church form in North America, in fact, consistently reinforces this idea?

For Leith, the church scatters as individual believers into the places where they live and work. There they witness to their life in Christ and invite non-believers to gather with them as a corporate body on Sunday mornings for worship and teaching. Because there is no intentional expression of the Church at any other location during the week, “Church” is popularly identified as the Sunday morning assembly where clergy lead the congregation in worship, preach from the Word and administer the sacraments. Volunteers assist the staff in providing programs for education and fellowship.

Leith’s traditional ecclesiastical approach exemplifies the purely modalic, centralized church form for mission and ministry.<sup>12</sup> As is the general custom in the West, he calls for

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10. “We call the building the church...but the building is not the church. It is simply the place where the church frequently gathers, worship and works.... The church is the people of God. The word ‘church’ in the New Testament is a Greek word that means an assembly or congregation that has been called out for some purpose” (Leith, *The Church*, 19-20).

11. Leith, *The Church*, 20.

12. Local Presbyterian congregations are linked together into additional modalities within their denomination called “courts.” The most basic church court is the “presbytery” which generally consists of the

baptized believers to gather together regularly on Sunday mornings where trained religious professionals remind them to align their lives with the precepts of the Gospel and call the unbaptized to repent and believe the same. In contrast to Leith, who, again, assumes that the individual is the primary scattered form of the Church, the other authors reviewed here place an increasing emphasis on a decentralized vision of the Church where she intentionally scatters into mid-sized groups in homes and other non-church venues during the week. As these authors shift more and more toward the sodalic end of the spectrum, these mid-sized groups become an increasingly important ecclesial form of their mission and ministry strategy.

### **Missional Reformation Model**

So, for example, Tim Keller, retired pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, inches just beyond Leith from the end of the modalic-sodalic scale toward the middle when he begins to hint of mid-sized communities as an effective strategy for community building, discipleship and mission.<sup>13</sup> In a columnar aside about three-fourths of the way through his *Center Church*, Keller almost passingly introduces the idea of mid-sized groups as way for city churches to extend their community outreach:

Many city churches will also find that midsize “parish” or “mezzanine” groups are helpful for creating community. These groups usually have twenty to sixty people who live in a neighborhood, work in the same profession, or share a common passion in the

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Presbyterian churches in a geographic area. Above this level of connection are “synods” and “general assemblies.” In some Presbyterian systems of government, these courts are considered the fundamental ecclesial unit, not the local church (e.g., the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.). In the ECO, the local church is the basic unit of church life. In that system, church courts are streamlined and designed to resource the local congregation.

13. Timothy J. Keller is the Chairman and co-Founder of Redeemer City to City, an organization which trains pastors for ministry in cities around the world including North America. In 1989, he founded Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and in 2005, he co-founded The Gospel Coalition. Keller is the author of a number of bestselling books.

city. They eat together regularly and consider how to reach out and serve the surrounding cultural, vocational, or geographic community.<sup>14</sup>

Other than agreeing with Michael Green that “the most important way that Christianity spread (was) through the extended household (*oikos*) evangelism done informally by Christians,” this is the only place in *Center Church* where Keller writes about a mid-sized group strategy for intentionally scattering the Church.<sup>15</sup> The bulk of his writing continues to focus on equipping individual believers for their witness in the workplace and the need to plant fully-orbed churches led by ordained pastors. Mid-sized sodalic groups do not appear to be the centerpiece of his strategy for reaching the cities of the West. However, the passage above does represent a degree of difference from Leith’s traditional ecclesial form. It is clear that Keller wants to adapt the classically Reformed model of ministry to his missiological context. He still affirms the Sunday morning gathering led by an ordained pastor as the key and normative expression of the Church, but he also acknowledges that growth in the Christian life happens not primarily in educational classes or in worship services but in the context of community.<sup>16</sup> For Keller mid-sized groups are an ideal environment for this growth to occur.

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14. Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 314.

15. Keller, *Center Church*, 278. See Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Publishing, 2003), 318.

16. Keller’s writing on the crucial nature of community for discipleship has astounding implications for churches from a historic Protestant heritage and the forms of ministry these churches should employ: “The gospel creates community.... Accordingly, the chief way in which we should disciple people (or, if you prefer, to form them spiritually) is through community. Growth in grace, wisdom, and character does not happen primarily in classes and instruction, through large worship gatherings, or even in solitude. Most often, growth happens through deep relationships and in communities where the implications of the gospel are worked out cognitively and worked in practically – in ways no other setting or venue can afford. The essence of becoming a disciple is, to put it colloquially, becoming like the people we hang out with the most. Just as the single most formative experience in our lives is our membership in a nuclear family, so the main way we grow in grace and holiness is through deep involvement in the family of God. Christian community is more than just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternative society. And it is through this alternative human society that God shapes us into who and what we are” (Keller, *Center Church*, 311).

## **European Balanced Model**

Moving into the middle of the modalic-sodalic ecclesiastical scale is the British pastor, author and consultant Mike Breen.<sup>17</sup> He advocates for what Reggie McNeal calls the “European Model” where mid-sized sodalities called “missional communities” (hereafter, “MC” and “MCs”) constellate around a central hub church that provides leadership, equipping, accountability and an every-week Sunday worship celebration that many of the participants in the MCs attend.<sup>18</sup> In Breen’s model, MCs are not stand-alone entities. Rather, they are formally networked into a modalic congregational body he calls a “missional sending center.”<sup>19</sup> This formal connection with a larger church structure allows MCs to take advantage of the resources of a greater movement and to participate in a weightier expression of a gathered form of the Church.

For Breen, MCs are not an organizational end in themselves; rather they are an attempt to recover and approximate biblical *oikos*, the extended family on mission, in and for the Western Church.<sup>20</sup> He builds his case for MCs from the success of the early Church in evangelizing much

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17. In 1994, Mike and Sally Breen moved to Sheffield where he became the senior rector of St. Thomas' Church, Crookes. By the year 2000 it had the highest attendance of any church in England. In 2004, the Breens moved to the United States, eventually living in Pawleys Island, South Carolina from 2008 to 2014 where they founded 3D Movements ([www.3dmovements.com](http://www.3dmovements.com)). In 2015 3DM decentralized into training hubs in North America and around the world in order to continue resourcing disciple-making leaders who have adopted Breen’s approach for mission and ministry. The Breens were covenant partners of FPC, Greenville, South Carolina from 2017 to early 2019 before he left to become the teaching pastor at Apex Community Church in Dayton, Ohio.

18. Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 39-64. Breen uses “family on mission” as a synonym for MC. Others use terms like “Gospel Family” and “incarnational community.” Previous editions of the ECO polity manual used the phrase “micro-expressions of the church” to include missional communities (*ECO Polity and Discipline Manual* 2.0502).

19. Mike Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements: The “Everyman” Notebook on How to Change the World* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), 169. Breen says that missional sending centers are “Communities that have enough spiritual mass, with leaders who embody the character and competency of Jesus, that they become place of training, sending and reproduction for leaders into the missional frontier, as well as a safe harbor of orbit for those coming from the missional frontier (Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements*, 169).

20. Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), 5.

of the Roman Empire and from their overwhelming prevalence in growing Christian movements around the world.<sup>21</sup> In *Leading Missional Communities*, Breen contends that the current brokenness of Western culture, brought on by a post-modern malaise and typified by loneliness and depression, has created an opportunity to “rebuild society by re-forming ‘extended family’ *oikos* communities.”<sup>22</sup> He says,

Our commission is to reach out to those around us, invite them to join us in community, share the story of the gospel, make disciples, and gather them into families to follow Jesus together. That’s really what starting an MC is all about.... MCs are simply the initial vehicle we learn to drive that gets us to the real destination: learning to live as *oikos*, extended families functioning together on mission with God.<sup>23</sup>

MCs are not simply for scheduling more regular events for people to attend. Rather, they are about living life together as believers and “establishing rhythms and routines that allow us to become an extended family on mission together.”<sup>24</sup>

Because of Breen, Alex Absalom and others, over the last few decades, MCs have increasingly become a centerpiece of the missional church conversation as a strategy for bringing the Gospel to Western Culture. Books, articles and even manuals on this topic abound in a way they did not twenty years ago.<sup>25</sup> Several of these authors look to the groundbreaking work of

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21. “The *oikos* in social space...is the single most significant vehicle of mission that God has ever released on the world.... In the 270 years between Pentecost and the Edict of Milan, the millions brought into the Kingdom are principally won through the vehicle of *oikos*.... The evangelization of the known world at that time was through the Greco-Roman household” (Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements*, 121). “The methodology of *oikos* traces all the way through the book of Acts and through the early church and straight through to the evangelization of Europe, Africa, Asia, and beyond. Whenever the church can gather publically it does. But it never forsakes the primary missional vehicle of the *oikos*. By living on this continuum, using this method, a persecuted people changed the world forever” (Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements*, 137).

22. Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 5.

23. Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 5.

24. Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 11.

25. Examples of some of these manuals are Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2010); Jonathan K. Dodson and Brad Watson, *Called Together: A Guide to Forming Missional Communities* (Austin: GCD Books, 2014); Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional. Monastic. Mainline: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in*

American anthropologist Edward T. Hall who in the 1960's wrote *The Hidden Dimension* in which he described how people behave and react in different types of culturally defined spaces.<sup>26</sup> Breen, Absalom and Bobby Harrington place particular focus on Hall's "social space" category noting how integral these types of relational spaces were to Jesus and to the early Church as they formed disciples in the context of *oikos*.<sup>27</sup> They remind their readers that for the first approximately three hundred years of the Church's existence, she did not regularly meet in dedicated space for large worship gatherings. Instead, these early believers met in homes.<sup>28</sup> They also note how social space is a key missing element in the ministry of most churches in North

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*Historically Mainline Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); and Eric Pfeiffer, *Missional Communities Leader Guide: Starting Growing, and Multiplying Your Missional Groups* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016). Authors from a UK context who have innovated some of Breen's insights include: Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Mark Greene, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline: Making a Difference Where You Are* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014; Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Dynamic Everyday Disciples* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012) and *Scattered and Gathered: Equipping Disciples for the Frontline* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Nic Harding, *Reimagine Church: Clarify the Win. Escape Busyness. Fulfill Your True Purpose* (Tacoma, WA: Missio Publishing, 2018) and *Manifesto: A Blueprint for Missional Church* (Maidstone, UK: River Publishing & Media Ltd., 2012).

26. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimensions* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990). Hall proposed that humans use four types of spaces to develop communications and relationships: public space, social space, personal space and intimate space. He called the study of this subject matter "proxemics." In the social space context, people stand between four and twelve feet apart. Social space gatherings are formed by groups of twenty to seventy people.

27. See Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 42-49, and Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 51.

28. "For the first three hundred years, Christian community was based in the home, in the context of the *oikos*, and not structured around dedicated buildings and public services. The same period also arguably saw the most rapid and prolific growth of any period from church history" (Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 34). Alan Hirsch also notes the tremendous growth of the early Church and adds data from the late nineteenth century underground house church movement in China: "About the time Mao Tse-tung took power...the church in China...estimated to number about 2 million adherents.... Christians may [now] number as many as 80 million.... Not unlike the early church, these people had very few Bibles.... They had no professional clergy, no official leadership structures, no centralized organization, no mass meetings, and yet they grew like mad" (Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006], 19-20). Contemporary missiologists report that the underground Church in Iran is currently the fastest growing church in the world (See for example, David Garrison, *A Wind in The House of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims Around The World To Faith In Jesus Christ* [Monument. CO: Wigtake Resources, 2014], 123-142). Christians in Iran meet primarily in homes.

America, even though more and more Western Church leaders are recognizing the value of these types of mid-sized groups for penetrating unreached communities in their ministry region.<sup>29</sup>

In their *Discipleship that Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help us Grow*, Harrington and Absalom are keen to address the fear that participation in MCs will detract from public worship services. They have found that

people who join missional communities from outside of the church will, if given enough time, naturally transition over to the public worship services. Primarily this happens because they follow the relational pathways that have been forged in the missional community. They will have heard stories and reports from the weekend services, and eventually their curiosity will be stroked enough that they will ask to come along with their friends.<sup>30</sup>

Along with Ralph Winter, they say that the key here is for the congregation to appreciate and maintain a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” perspective in relation to the gathered (modalic) and scattered (sodalic) forms of the Church.<sup>31</sup>

Hugh Halter and Matt Smay echo this same call for a balanced approach.<sup>32</sup> In their book *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, they claim that without an equal emphasis on sodalic forms of the Church, the Body of Christ in North America will increasingly slip into irrelevancy:

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29. “Obviously, the main purpose of this book is to look at social space, or what we call Missional Communities, since this is very much the missing link in the church today. Western churches tend to offer only two ways to belong: public space and some kind of blend of personal/intimate” (Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 46). “Missional communities are the rare, but best, expression of the Social Context in church life. This context is conspicuous by its absence in most churches!” (*Fits*, 60).

30. Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*, 105.

31. Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*, 105. “It is our attempt here to help church leaders and others to understand the legitimacy of *both* structures, and the necessity for both structures not only to exist but to work together harmoniously for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and for the fulfillment of all that God desires for our time” (Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” 253).

32. “[Our] hope for this book is that it will push the church, in all forms, to find God’s balance: gathering people well AND missionally scattering them as incarnational communities. One of our goals is to convince you that every church and church leader is better off when they take both sides of this equation seriously (Halter and Smay, *AND*, 73). Along with Alan Hirsch, Hugh Halter is a member of the Forge America Network team. The author of seven books, he is a frequent preconference and workshop leader at the Exponential Conferences.

With the growing chasm between what the culture desires and what the modality-laden church offers, if sodalic, second-decision communities don't soon emerge, the existing, one-armed modalic church will be (*sic*) end up becoming nothing more than a hospital, social/spiritual club, or teaching center. This church will effectively lose its ability to influence the culture.<sup>33</sup>

Like Breen, Absalom and Harrington, Halter and Smay believe that sodalic incarnational communities (i.e., MCs) are an effective means to redress the imbalance in the Western Church.<sup>34</sup> They state that in a large historic congregation, where the emphasis is almost certainly on attracting people to public worship, the task of the leader will be to

push the other direction. Realize that your large weekly gathering is important, but it really can't deliver that family sense. Your work will be to pilot some small incarnational communities as the substructure of the larger church family.... If you don't have smaller incarnational communities and midsize connections points, those who are presently outside your church margins are not likely to find meaning in the sixty-minute weekly church service.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to Leith's approach where covenant partners witness as individuals and then invite non-believers to the church campus (modality), Halter and Smay assert, much like Lesslie Newbigin and Keller, that the gathered community on mission (sodality) is the primary "hermeneutic of the gospel."<sup>36</sup> "The core issue is the missionary question: 'How can we best

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33. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 128. Halter and Smay say the key reason the Church has lost influence in the West is because "we've been trying to reach the world with *half* of the church! We've allowed separation to develop between parts of Christ's body [modalic and sodalic] that were always intended to work together" (Halter and Smay, *AND*, 131).

34. "Incarnational community [is] a substructure of church where a small band of 'missional people' intentionally integrate into the lives of the unchurched" (Halter and Smay, *AND*, 66).

35. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 177.

36. "I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible for the gospel to be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the Gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it" (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989], 227). So too Keller writes, "Community shapes the nature of our witness and our engagement in mission. The real secret of fruitful and effective mission in the world is the quality of our community. Exceptional character in individuals cannot prove the reality of Christianity. Atheism, as well as many other religions, can also produce individual heroes of unusual moral greatness.... What atheism and other religions *cannot* produce is the kind of loving community that the gospel produces. In fact, Jesus states that our deep unity is

engage the culture to which God has called us?’ In our present context, we believe the answer we are suggesting in this book closely mirrors the missionary context of the early church. The community, not the individual is the primary witness to this ‘bigger gospel.’”<sup>37</sup>

Halter and Smay believe that MCs can serve as an interim step where neighbors and friends are initially invited into an extended family on mission (sodality) in which they can live in authentic relationship with believers before they are introduced to the larger body of the Church (modality):

If you want your existing church to successfully engage the culture, you don’t begin by telling your people to engage and then bring ’em to church. You must first start by creating a new environment for them that provides a better witness to the culture and is the best way to see the kingdom lived out in concrete ways. The incarnational community that forms can then go out together and will eventually form the bridge between your cultural engagement with the world and the corporate structure of the church.<sup>38</sup>

In distinction from Leith and Keller, all of these proponents of some form of the “European” model very clearly advocate for a more balanced and symbiotic approach to the intentional gathering and scattering of the Church where she scatters throughout the week not as individuals, but as MCs that engage in worship, fellowship and mission. These mid-sized groups then re-assemble as a collection of witnessing communities to celebrate how God has been at work in their lives since the last time they came together as a corporate body.<sup>39</sup> In some ways,

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the way the world will know that the Father sent him and has loved us even as the Father has loved him (John 17:23). Jesus says that the main way people will believe that Christians have found the love of God is by seeing the quality of their life together in community” (Keller, *Center Church*, 311). Though both Newbigin and Keller seem to be writing about the power of the Gospel to create community in a modalic form, the same can be said of sodalic forms as well.

37. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 66.

38. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 66.

39. St. Thomas Crookes in Sheffield, England epitomizes this balanced centralized/decentralized model. It is a “more suburban and hybrid mode congregation, with a highly attractional worship ministry augmented with missional communities as an outreach strategy.... Missional communities are not stand alone entities in the St. Thomas system. They ‘orbit the celebration,’ [celebration is the term used for the gathered church in worship]. Missional communities are not *in spite of* or *in place of* the gathered church. ‘There has to be some connection to the

this model parallels the regional cathedral and local parish strategy of the Middle Ages which Breen and Absalom highlight as a potential model for the twenty-first century Church:

The small village missions that people attended locally were pioneering the missional frontiers and discipling people and reaching into un-evangelized villages. At the same time, people were connected to a cathedral where, every once in a while, everyone gathered and saw just how big and glorious the Kingdom of God was. When these models worked in tandem together, they evangelized the whole of Europe. The combination of a missional sending center (the cathedral) and the smaller, missional outposts won the day.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, Leith also recounts some of the positive aspects of the Medieval European parish church model:

The parish church had responsibility for the whole life of the community (political, social, and economic) and for every person in the community, whether or not they were active members of the congregation. There was a real advantage of this. Today it is easy for local congregations to feel responsible for their members but not for the community at large.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, just a few pages later, he calls for the Western Church to once again “learn to be a witnessing congregation” in the midst of its dramatically changing postmodern cultural context.<sup>42</sup>

It apparently does not occur to Leith that some form of the MC/parish church model might actually be an effective solution to the mainline church’s struggle to connect with its surrounding neighborhoods and communities. Instead, he assumes that the local building-centric model as it

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base, even if it is only a leadership connection,’ ... This connection is essential for accountability and can be one way the missional community is distinguished from a stand-alone house church” (McNeal, *Missional Communities*, 41, 44). Another British example of this model is Frontline Church in Liverpool, England previously pastored by Nic Harding and currently pastored by John Harding.

40. Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 51. Breen draws the reader’s attention to the work of John Finney (*Recovering the Past* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1998]) who describes how the Celtic and Roman ecclesiastical models of the Middle Ages combined to evangelize the British Isles and how the strategies used then could be applied again toward the re-evangelization of the post-Christian UK. In a similar vein, see George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 2000.

41. Leith, *The Church*, 23.

42. Leith, *The Church*, 24. Perhaps, coincidentally, the context Leith describes sounds very much like the world of the NT.

is traditionally conceived should continue as the predominant church form, albeit with some unknown modification. Like so many in the mainline Protestant tradition, he seemingly fails to see the adaptive insights of the other authors reviewed here that are related to mid-sized sodalic groups as a potential strategy for reaching the West with the Gospel.<sup>43</sup>

### **Networked House Church Model**

Moving just beyond the mid-point of the modalic-sodalic scale is the networked house church model. For those who advocate for this approach, the emphasis tips from a balance between gathered and scattered church forms toward a more pronounced sodalic dynamic. The individual house church or MC becomes the dominant ecclesial unit of the Church rather than the gathered corporate body. In this model, these smaller home units only rarely assemble together for corporate worship, if at all. However, they are networked in some fashion into a larger movement for equipping, resourcing and accountability.

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43. Two other North American-based expressions of the balanced approach are of note. The Soma Family of Churches founded by Jeff Vanderstelt and Caesar Kalinowski in 2004 in the Pacific Northwest now extends internationally. Soma Churches engage in weekly Sunday church “Gatherings” but are also committed to missional communities which allow members to be the Church for one another and for the neighborhoods they are called to reach. The Soma organization offers training events, learning communities, materials and coaching opportunities for those who desire to learn from their approach (see <https://wearesoma.com> and <https://saturatetheworld.com>). See Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015) and *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), and Jeff Vanderstelt and Ben Connelly, *Saturate Field Guide: Principles & Practices for Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life*, 3rd ed. (Bellevue, WA: Saturate Publishing, 2018). The Austin Stone Church has six campuses around Austin, TX that gather regularly on Sunday mornings. Their missional communities meet during the week to reach “pockets of people who have not been renewed and redeemed by the gospel” (Todd Engstrom, “What is a Missional Community?,” Verge, November 13, 2014, accessed March 10, 2021, [www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community)). See Todd Engstrom, “3 Ways to Kill a Missional Culture,” December 2, 2013, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://toddengstrom.com/2013/12/02/3-ways-to-kill-a-missional-culture/>, and “Transitioning Your Church to Missional Communities,” September 30, 2013, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://toddengstrom.com/2013/09/30/transitioning-your-church-to-missional-communities/>.

The Tampa Underground Network in Tampa, Florida, founded by Brian Sanders, has become a pioneer of this decentralized-yet-still-networked model in North America.<sup>44</sup> After noting a number of weaknesses in the purely modalic, gathering-centric model, Sanders asks his readers of *Underground Church: A Living Example of the Church in its Most Potent Form* to conceive of the Church as a decentralized network rather than as a centralized hierarchy.<sup>45</sup> He believes that “networks” are the future of almost all organizations, including churches:

The idea of church as a decentralized network is not just gaining traction; it seems to be the future. As I said earlier, it is my view that we are speeding toward a future where our most powerful communities will be understood through the lens of network instead of institution. Networks will outnumber hierarchies. The question is not *whether* we will be networked in the coming years, it’s *how* we will be networked and *who* will set the terms.<sup>46</sup>

Though Sanders feels the Church in the West needs to tilt away from a purely centralized form and toward a more decentralized model, he does acknowledge the need for some type of

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44. The Underground movement in Tampa has resourced fifteen other networks in the United States and around the world ([www.undergroundnetwork.org](http://www.undergroundnetwork.org)). One of these networks is the KC Underground in Kansas City, Missouri. KC’s lead pastor, Rob Wegner, was heavily influenced by Mike Breen, Alex Absalom and Alan Hirsch (Rob Wegner, “Launching Missional Communities: A Book You Have To Read,” Rob Wegner: Blog Archive, February 24, 2011, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://entermission.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2011/02/launching-missional-communities-a-book-you-have-to-read.html](https://entermission.typepad.com/my_weblog/2011/02/launching-missional-communities-a-book-you-have-to-read.html)).

45. As a part of his critique, Sanders criticizes the traditional church approach for adopting an economic model that dissuades the inclusion of the poor: “How, for instance, can our current form of middle-class churches effectively reach and include the poor? Many of our churches are economically structured to depend on the offerings they bring. Poor people, then, are a liability to the model.... The poor will never really be welcome (not in numbers) because they cannot keep the lights on, pay high salaries or build a children’s wonderland.... All of the church’s income comes from offerings collected at the Sunday service. This is their financial model. It is built on a consumer premise. People have a choice where they worship. On Sunday, and, in turn, where they give 10 percent.... Therefore the product they offer is a Sunday-morning experience. If that product suffers – that is, if the parking lot is unusable...[and people] stop attending – then there will be no money to spend on anything. Salaries would be in jeopardy. The very existence of the church is dependent on the quality of that Sunday service” (Brian Sanders, *Underground Church: A Living example of the Church in its Most Potent Form* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018], 191-192).

“There are pitfalls with a centralized model like this.... Hierarchy almost always stifles mission in my experience. When a stage is the platform and a few professionals become the *de facto* priesthood, we limit the scope and strength of the church’s real engine: which is made up of its people. Big church also means big bureaucracy. Gaining access to resources to those shared resources can be like running the gauntlet, and failure is often the outcome” (Sanders, *Underground Church*, 194).

The Underground in Tampa does gather as a movement from time to time, but these gatherings which include worship are for equipping microchurch leaders rather than for public consumption.

46. Sanders, *Underground Church*, 195.

centralized leadership: “Unfortunately, the church in simple, decentralized form can attract unhealthy leaders and typically lacks the governance required to deal with them. Heresy, demagoguery, spiritual abuse, mismanagement of money, and the like are all threats to small church movements.”<sup>47</sup>

Underground’s answer for the need to both decentralize *and* centralize is to create two different structures under one umbrella:

Our two-structure approach allows us to centralize those systems that best serve the church from the center, while keeping the identity of the church at large as a decentralized reality. It gives us the advantage of mobilizing strong, lean, nimble apostolic leadership, while simultaneously operating a congregational leadership that gives the Holy Spirit preeminence. We are not trying to create a hybrid approach through one entity; rather, we are accepting the value of both kinds of structures by embracing them both and organizing ourselves into two complementary, yet distinct entities. That division of labor allows us to look at the biblical model of church and the practical realities of mission and allocate our work into one of these two silos: the network of churches on one side and the mission organization on the other.<sup>48</sup>

The result is a model in which two complementary yet fundamentally different organizations collaborate with one another. They are not equal, however. The centralized, modalic aspect of the larger entity called “Underground” serves the sodality – the organic house church movement:

On the one hand, the UNDERGROUND exists as an organic network of autonomous microchurches, each united by their agreement to a set of values (the Manifesto) and to a set of standards of character and conduct (eldership and the leadership covenant). On the other hand, the UNDERGROUND is a tightly organized (501[c]3) mission agency led by a board of directors whose sole purpose is to provide a service platform for microchurches to be planted, equipped, supported, and stimulated to grow and thrive.<sup>49</sup>

This model is quite different, of course, from the balanced approach of Breen, Absalom, Halter, Jeff Vanderstelt and Todd Engstrom who all want to take advantage of the *gravitas* of

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47. Sanders, *Underground Church*, 195.

48. Sanders, *Underground Church*, 197.

49. Sanders, *Underground Church*, 198.

gathered church events for vision casting, training and inspiration. Sanders wants to move away from large, public worship gatherings because in North American culture they invite consumerism.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there is some merit to Sanders' charge as Halter and Smay write about how they cancel Sunday morning worship services from time to time when too many consumer Christians begin attending the church they lead:

There's only one way to overcome the problem of consumerism...*you have to remove what they are consuming....* A few months ago, in response to some rapid transfer growth in Adullam...we decided to take six weeks and only meet twice a month for larger church gatherings.... [We did this] to help filter through Christians who had 'transferred' to us. We noticed that though many people were inspired by the Adullam story and Adullam way of life, they just came to church every week. Consumerism was a deep concern for us and we wanted more for them. So we made this short-term adjustment.<sup>51</sup>

### **Independent House Church Model**

At the far end of the modalic-sodalic scale is the independent house church model. This approach includes no permanent modalic forms including large Sunday gatherings for worship. Instead, individual house churches are the sole ecclesial unit of the Church.

Author and church planter Neil Cole is an internationally known proponent of this non-networked house church approach. In his *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*, Cole highlights the term "chaordic" which refers to "chaotic order." Chaordic describes an approach to managing and leading people in the place between chaos and order.<sup>52</sup> To explain his

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50. Sanders, *Underground Church*, 52-55.

51. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 81-82. Breen also acknowledges the primary role of solidities over modalities for mission: "Operate in the public space when you can, but use the social space as the principal place for mission. It's not that other space can't do it. It's just that it seems to be done best in this extended family size" (Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements*, 146).

52. Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 123.

approach, Cole quotes Dee Hock, the founder of VISA, who has examined genetic science and how organic growth occurs. Hock states,

Purpose and principles, clearly understood and articulated, and commonly shared, are the genetic code of any healthy organization. To the degree that you hold purpose and principles in common among you, you can dispense with command and control. People will know how to behave in accordance with them, and they'll do it in thousands of unimaginable, creative ways. The organization will become a vital, living set of beliefs.<sup>53</sup>

Believing that these principles of order within chaos are reflected both in creation and in the Book of Acts, Cole applies these concepts to the life of the contemporary Church: "Just as in nature, DNA in the church provides the intrinsic code necessary for control, order, and form. We must have more faith in Christ's DNA – divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission – than in our own human structures and controls."<sup>54</sup>

For Cole, the internal DNA of the Church, is set by God, not human invention: "The pattern emerges from the Designer, not human leadership. When God is the engineer, there is an order and a pattern that is healthy, natural, and strong. The church can be chaordic."<sup>55</sup>

Cole acknowledges that at times some structure beyond the house church is necessary, though it should only be temporary:

Occasionally, even organic bodies require some external support – a cast, a cane, or a sling – to help heal an injury. They are not the norm and are only considered temporary until health is restored. If you find that you have external structures holding up your church, look to bring health and internal strength to the church so that the external structure becomes obsolete and you can set it aside.<sup>56</sup>

Cole contrasts the typical church organizational chart used to display a congregation's lines of command and control with an organic diagram of a spontaneous multiplication

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53. Dee Hock, *The Birth of the Chaordic Age* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), quoted in Cole, *Organic Church*, 124.

54. Cole, *Organic Church*, 124.

55. Cole, *Organic Church*, 124.

56. Cole, *Organic Church*, 126.

movement where each scattered “member” carries the DNA of the movement in a repeated pattern called a “fractal”:

The pattern remains the same no matter how many times it is multiplied. To have a leadership structure that grows with the body, we need to have a similar design that maintains its own integrity no matter how many times it is multiplied.... Fractals teach us a lesson for organic church movements. We learn that in nature there is a pattern that holds true at every level of growth and development. This is also true in a spontaneously multiplying movement, where our hands-on control is not possible, or even desired. God’s living truth (D), in the context of loving relationships (N) and a global mission (A), provides the integrity in an organic church movement. This DNA makes up the three points of the triangle of our fractal design.<sup>57</sup>

The result is “a church planting movement that is self-organized, self-governing, and self-perpetuating – each peripheral part as well as the whole. Such a movement would foster cooperation and coherence, yet each unit could maintain autonomy at the same time.”<sup>58</sup>

Church Multiplication Associates (CMA), the church planting ministry that Cole directs, is not a denominational mission board or an organization in which someone may join. Rather, it is a ministry that seeks to resource anyone who desires to carry forward CMA’s understanding of the DNA of the Church:

We tell people that if they are of the same DNA, they are *already a part of the movement*. We welcome them to the family. They become carriers of the virus without need of a central office to check up on them. We are less concerned about denominational affiliation than we are with containing the healthy DNA in each of the movement’s smallest parts as well as the whole. Can this work? Yes, I believe it can. My goal is not to build an organization, a denomination, or an agency. My goal is a real movement, an epidemic.<sup>59</sup>

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57. Cole, *Organic Church*, 128-129. See also pages 126-127.

58. Cole, *Organic Church*, 137.

59. Cole, *Organic Church*, 138. “Church Multiplication Associates (CMA) & CMAResources encourage multiplication movements by developing healthy disciples, leaders, churches and movements” (“Church Multiplication Associates // CMA Resources.org,” accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/CMAResources>). CMA asks for no applications or ministry reports. As of 2005 Cole and CMA have been a part of starting over seven hundred house churches in thirty-two states and twenty-three countries. The ministry started in 1990.

Unlike all the other authors reviewed here, Cole believes the individual house church can carry the full weight of mission and ministry by itself in a North American context without any real need for a permanent network or denomination. Other than the training and coaching they get from CMA, these house churches are essentially on their own.<sup>60</sup>

From a traditional Reformed perspective, Leith and Keller would no doubt charge Cole with underestimating the radical nature of human sin and would argue that house churches (and indeed all forms of the Church) need more than ad hoc accountability structure. Combined with what they would see as an anemic ecclesiology and a lack of catholicity, Leith and Keller would no doubt find Cole's overall model of Church inadequate. Keller certainly believes that an institutionally organized church can still demonstrate movement dynamics.<sup>61</sup>

Breen, Absalom and others might also point out how Cole fails to take advantage of a larger hub church's economy of scale for mission and ministry resources and synergistic impact.<sup>62</sup> Sanders' innovative approach in Tampa allows the mission organization side of The Underground to take on the legal, liability and policy burdens of their microchurches so that their

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60. In the summer of 2016 at a 100M Conference in Snellville, Georgia, I heard Cole remark that there are house churches just a few blocks from one another he helped to start in Los Angeles that have no idea of one another's existence.

61. "Many thinkers today are so opposed to corporate structures such as committees, parliamentary procedures, and top-down authority that they insist churches and ministers stay extremely small. They recognize that a growth in size inevitably brings the need for more formality of organization, so, reading between the lines, you can see they consider churches and ministries that are too big to meet in a home or café to be too big. Ironically, this conclusion demonstrates a lack of flexibility in ministry thinking. Experience shows that churches and ministries of all sizes can have an institutionalized form or can exhibit movement dynamics" (Keller, *Center Church*, 350).

62. For a critique of Cole's house church model from a historic, Reformed perspective see Kevin McFadden, "Book Review: Organic Church, by Neil Cole," March 2, 2010, accessed, March 10, 2021, [www.9marks.org/review/organic-church-neil-cole](http://www.9marks.org/review/organic-church-neil-cole). Relying once again upon the classic Protestant Marks of the Church, McFadden says, "Cole defines the church as 'the presence of Jesus among His people called out as a spiritual family to pursue His mission on this planet.' There is certainly truth in this definition, but our Protestant forebears would have considered it biblically deficient, pointing to the importance of the right preaching of the gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and church discipline.... It is questionable whether many modern home fellowships, which used to complement the local church, will really carry out the duties of the church."

sodalities (microchurches) can operate more freely. Clearly, Cole's approach does not appear to take advantage of some of the Tampa Underground's model.

The strength of Cole's model is its lack of overhead with no buildings and few assets to maintain. Like missional communities, house churches are light, sustainable, and scalable because they are not dependent upon one highly trained charismatic individual.<sup>63</sup> They are easy to multiply because they can be planted anywhere and theoretically anyone can lead them. They also take advantage of the relational dynamism of mid-sized groups which feature high levels of accountability and more opportunity for leadership.

Leith's purely modalic model is neither light, scalable nor easily reproducible. It requires large amounts of money to build and preserve church facilities and to pay professional staff. Years of training are also necessary before a mainline pastor can lead a church of this type. Additionally, the traditional Reformation approach rarely includes an intentional plan for engaging the community other than for individual members to invite friends and family to Sunday morning worship services where they can be further assimilated into the life and ministry of the congregation. Covenant partners of the church, like the man mentioned in one of the stories from the opening scene of chapter one, are at a loss when those they know and meet are no longer inclined to come to the church's campus. For these reasons and more, some commentators have begun to assert that the predominant historic modalic approach to

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63. Breen says he learned in the early 1990s that MCs are so easily reproducible because they are "scalable and sustainable. Normal people with 9-to-5 jobs had something they could take ownership of, something they could lead, grow, and multiply. They could be the ones taking new territory for the Kingdom. We weren't just seeing the Priesthood of all Believers but the Missionhood of all Believers. Once you learned what it takes to give birth to one, that's all you need. You can teach others the same thing" (Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements*, 146).

congregational life is becoming increasingly untenable as the West moves further and further into a post-Christendom era.<sup>64</sup>

For a historic church that has been seeped for decades or longer in a more traditional mainline model, the introduction of sodalities into the church's ministry approach may seem quaint for some and disconcerting for others. For those who are familiar with the historic model there is a comforting sense that everyone seems to know what to do. Ordained officers "run" the mechanics of the church, volunteer lay leaders work alongside professional staff to offer appealing religious goods and services, and covenant partners and visitors attend the events on the church campus so that they can consume the programs. This traditional Reformation model may appear to work because it is so easily adaptable to American consumer culture with its preoccupation with celebrity and the desire to receive excellent goods and services. Though this approach is biblically tenuous, it can be effective to some degree until the culture decides the Church is no longer a valuable commodity and discontinues delivering consumers to its doors.<sup>65</sup>

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64. David Wheeler in *The Atlantic* notes that a declining number of churches in North America are able to afford a full-time pastor. As a result, many recent seminary graduates and church planters are increasingly taking secular jobs to supplement their incomes (David Wheeler, "Higher Calling, Lower Wages: The Vanishing of the Middle-Class Clergy," *The Atlantic*, July 22, 2014, accessed December 19, 2020 ([www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/07/higher-calling-lower-wages-the-collapse-of-the-middle-class-clergy/374786](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/07/higher-calling-lower-wages-the-collapse-of-the-middle-class-clergy/374786)). An older posting at The Hartford Institute for Religious Research describes somewhat the same phenomenon. The number of full-time clergy positions (senior and associate) at medium to large churches is declining and smaller congregations are typically not able to offer attractive compensation to prospective pastors. The article states, "These models paint a bleak picture of the clergy job market.... Clergy see a surplus of clergy who are competing for the same jobs, forcing many to work part time outside the church, or move into non-parish positions and ultimately begin new careers because they cannot find an adequate position within a church setting (Patricia Chang, "The Clergy Job Market: What are the opportunities for ministry in the 21st century?," *The Hartford Institute for Religious Research*, May 2003, accessed December 19, 2020, ([http://hirr.hartsem.edu/leadership/clergyresources\\_clergyjobs.html](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/leadership/clergyresources_clergyjobs.html)).

65. Missional church authors like Halter and Smay contend that consumerism represents the greatest external and internal threat to the Church. Writing on the internal threat of consumerism to the life and ministry of a congregation, they challenge pastors "to work *against* the same sinister cycle of activity that drives our churches and rarely produces anything that is good and lasting. This cycle of meaningless activity is something that happens naturally when leaders lose sight of the main thing. Instead of being driven by the missional purpose of the church, something else has us all running and getting weary...consumerism. Consumerism is the self-focused drive to get as much as I can get with the least amount of effort. It coercively shifts the church away from its true call, from valuing giving to getting. It compels us to protect what we already have and only to give away what has become useless to

## **Training for Missional Disciple Making: Pastor as Equiper of a Missional Discipleship Movement**

The second section of this literature review will consider what ministry activities a pastor should perform in order to initiate and maintain a self-replicating missional discipleship movement. Once again, a spectrum of approaches can be detected among the authors who will be cited. These range from the traditional Protestant pastor-centric delivery model of ministry where “the minister” serves as the preeminent and direct discipler of the congregation to a “pastor as equiper” approach where he or she trains covenant partners in the congregation to engage in a wide-range of ministry activities, to a multiplication approach in which the pastor leads a small group of high capacity covenant partners in order to model for them a specialized discipleship training that will lead to a self-replicating every-member discipleship movement.

## **The Christendom Delivery Model: Pastor as the Locus of Disciple Making**

Once again, John H. Leith represents a classic expression of the traditional Reformed mainline perspective related to how a pastor should approach the disciple-making task. After bemoaning the apparent decline of Reformation heritage congregations in North America in his *Generation to Generation: The Renewal of the Church According to its Own Theology and Practice*, he plainly states his prescription for congregational renewal: “The church is renewed by preaching, teaching, and pastoral care as they have been traditionally practiced in the

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us. It erodes our sense of duty, honor, loyalty, and chivalry to live for the right things and the best things.... It pushes responsibility and expectations onto others instead of self and exchanges true spiritual growth for ankle-deep personal devotionals and self-help measures... .In American ‘Churchland,’ both spiritual leaders who provide the goods and those who consume the goods are to blame. In a sense, they are eating each other and producing little kingdom fruit. Once the goods are provided, and they continue to be delivered in the same fashion over and over by the same providers, humans naturally start to devalue what was once a deeply desired commodity. In a sense, they give ownership and responsibility to whoever provides for them. They stop growing on their own and no longer dream about the plans God might have for their lives. Hearts that were once growing and alive begin to atrophy, leaders grow weary, and the church shrivels – in numbers and depth of spiritual maturity” (Halter and Smay, *AND*, 73-74).

churches.... The Protestant churches that endure are those that emphasize preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. There are no shortcuts.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite the fact that Leith offers no contemporary anecdotal or statistical evidence for his medicament, he confidently asserts that a deliberate recommitment to the historic Reformation model will lead to a reemergence of the mainline Presbyterian Church.<sup>67</sup> Leith does not use the terms “equip” or “discipleship” in his book (other than to refer to Jesus’ original followers), but his readers may assume he believes that as a well-trained pastor engages in Word-centered preaching, teaching and pastoral care, the covenant partners within the reach of his or her ministry will be effectively nurtured as believers toward a fruitful relationship with Christ.<sup>68</sup>

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66. John H. Leith, *From Generation to Generation: The Renewal of the Church According to its Own Theology and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 15. The book contains Leith’s 1989 Annie Kirkland Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. In it he gives two reasons for the Presbyterian Church’s decline: the ascendancy of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his theological descendants into the academic life of the mainline seminaries and a reliance upon business techniques. Demonstrating his irascible personality, Leith writes, “Without the gospel, the church is just another political party or therapeutic group, albeit claiming divine sanction for its secular wisdom. Theologians have been engaged for decades in a search to establish the Christian faith upon some foundation that is accessible to human beings in their own experience and reasoning. These efforts have not been successful, and there is little reason in the history of the church to believe they will be” (Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 13). A few pages later he adds, “Management skills, understanding of goal-setting processes, therapy, public relations, conflict management do not gather and build churches. Churches that serve basic human needs sometimes thrive without much theology, and modern communications techniques can turn ministers without education into excellent entertainers. I know of no evidence that these skills gather and build congregations of faith” (Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 15).

67. “It is this writer’s intention that nothing should appear in these lectures that has not been tested in the pastorate and certified in the mainstream of the Reformed heritage” (Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 10).

68. A more contemporary example of the pastor-centric approach to leadership and discipleship is Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Beeley currently serves as the Jack and Barbara Bovender Professor of Theology, Anglican Studies, and Ministry and Director of the Anglican Episcopal House of Studies at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina. He draws from the example of various early church fathers including Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine and Gregory the Great to construct a model of church leadership that, like Leith, focuses solely on the need for pastors to shepherd their flocks primarily through preaching, teaching and pastoral care: “At the center of pastoral ministry, then, is the feeding of God’s flock with the word that fills and moves the heart and leads us to praise God” (Beeley, *Leading God’s People*, 108). Although he quotes Ephesians 4:11-12, at no point does Beeley speak of a requirement for clergy to equip the laity for their own ministry of community building and disciple-making in the world. Both Leith and Beeley’s approach to church leadership and disciple-making are commonly termed as “clericalism.”

Leith seeks to make it clear that all Christians are capable of “Christian ministry” by virtue of their baptism, but other than the commission to “be a witness to the faith and to do deeds of love and mercy” as individual believers, he does not share what else this authorization might entail.<sup>69</sup> There is a strong sense in Leith’s writings that almost all consequential ministry revolves around the crucial ability of the pastor to deliver excellent preaching, teaching and pastoral care. This is consistent with the historic Reformed emphasis on a highly educated clergy.<sup>70</sup> Although a good pastor may certainly train his or her Sunday School and youth volunteers to teach in and for a classroom format, at no point does Leith consider whether a covenant partner can or should disciple another covenant partner in such a way that they in turn can disciple others. What is made clear by Leith’s repetition is that “the well-being of the church depends above all else on the people who are hearing the gospel, the church, and upon the competence and dedication of ministers whom the people call to preach, teach, and exercise pastoral care.”<sup>71</sup>

The pastor-centric Christendom “delivery” model of ministry that Leith embodies has over the last few decades come under withering criticism by almost all missional church authors. Phillip W. Sell, for example, in his chapter “Leadership in the Missional Church: Pastoral Realities of Post-Christendom” from *Missional Disciple-Making: Disciple-Making for the*

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69. Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 67.

70. “The importance of the task of the minister in the church has always been emphasized, but by no one more so than by Reformed Christians in general and John Calvin in particular. The function of the minister, but not the status of the minister, is necessary for the church’s existence. The cruciality of the minister’s task made the personal and theological qualifications of the minister of the highest importance. Reformed churches have maintained this emphasis upon a qualified ministry, albeit with corruptions, for four centuries. For much of this time, the Presbyterian minister was frequently the best trained and most highly qualified person in the community. Today, this emphasis upon the personal strength and the theological competence of the ministry is greatly at risk” (Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 63).

71. Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 81.

*Purpose of Mission*, summarizes the anemic state of discipleship in the historic mainline church in this manner:

Discipleship, if it is emphasized at all, tends to be the responsibility of the individual Christian in response to the Scriptures preached, or it is reduced to the classroom experience with a distinct curricular gauntlet to run. In the latter case, when the curriculum is completed, the individual Christian is dubbed a “disciple.” The role of the laity in the traditional church is to serve in order to keep “the church program humming,” to learn all they can from the preaching and teaching of the clergy, to give monetarily to keep the budget solvent, and to invite people to “come and see.” The “outreach” or “evangelistic” expectation of the laity is reduced to asking unbelievers and unchurched folks to “come and see” what is happening at services and events in the church building. At such events or services, most reaping of the evangelistic harvest is done by the clergy. There is minimum expectation that a parishioner will be able to evangelize in her or her sphere of influence and reproduce disciples who will also make disciples.<sup>72</sup>

*Generation to Generation* contains a full chapter on the teaching role of the pastor, but it merely covers the content of what should be taught.<sup>73</sup> Leith clearly favors the classroom format for instruction without consideration of the NT rabbi-disciple/parent-child discipleship patterns. Sell explains the result of the classic Western Protestant approach to disciple making:

In this model, “teaching” is reduced to “structuring content,” and gives little or no attention to structuring modeling or structuring experiences for disciples in the context of witness, service and mission. The low expectation of parishioner involvement in the multiplication of disciples, and non-biblical approach to learning derails the impact of the traditional model.<sup>74</sup>

Missional church authors note the programmatic disciple making approach of the seeker attractional church model, a more modern iteration of the Christendom delivery model, has fared

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72. Phillip W. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church: Pastoral Realities of Post-Christendom,” in *Missional Disciple-Making: Disciple-Making for the Purpose of Mission*, ed. Michael Breen and David M. Gustafson (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2019), 152-153.

73. Leith offers an outline for what should be taught in a congregation’s Christian education program: “Teaching in the church gives instruction (1) in the scriptures, (2) in theology, (3) in the interpretation of human existence in the world in the light of Christian faith, and (4) in the duties and practices of the Christian faith” (Leith, *From Generation to Generation*, 123-124). He asserts that proficiency in these areas requires memory work. This includes memorization of the books of the Bible in order, the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments as well as a number of biblical passages and familiar hymns (131). Leith also encourages a basic knowledge of church history and doctrine that encompasses the ancient ecumenical creeds and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms along with some of the leading lights of the Protestant Reformation (133-134).

74. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church,” 153.

little better in its desire to make mature followers of Jesus. Here, the pastor is typically removed from any intimate discipleship process:

Discipleship in seeker, programmatic churches was reduced to a program or series of classes. Rarely was the lead pastor directly involved in the interpersonal discipleship of other believers, and if they were, it was an ancillary activity, not a core requirement in their job description. The end goal of the discipleship process, if there was one, was service within the programmatic structure of the church, not the reproduction of other disciples.<sup>75</sup>

Sell and other missional church authors maintain that the seeker approach to discipleship is counterproductive because it is antithetical to Jesus' call for the believer to take up his or her own cross in service to Christ and his kingdom. Instead, the seeker church attempts to comfortably gratify the individual needs of the spiritual consumer:

The major challenge that seeker programmatic churches never solved is disciple-making. Attracting people to church services based on felt needs and a marketing profile subtly sucked the church into a marketing, consumer-oriented mentality.... Admittedly, while no one is intentionally trying to do this, it often becomes the negative unintended consequence of the seeker, attractional approach to ministry via felt-needs. In these churches, discipleship feels like a "bait-and-switch." Helping people to mature in Christian faith – let alone to reproduce themselves spiritually – becomes especially difficult. In contrast, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die." This simple statement affirms that discipleship entails laying aside one's self-agenda, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus' agenda. This call to

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75. Sell, "Leadership in the Missional Church," 153. Sell adds that "home plate" in Saddleback's baseball diamond discipleship process represents placement in the programmatic structure of the church. Ogden gives four reasons for the failure of the program model of discipleship. First, they tend to be information based: "Programs operate on the assumption that if someone has information, having that information will automatically lead to transformation. In other words, right information will produce right living" (Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, rev. & exp. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2016], 45). The problem here is that humans can easily compartmentalize truth without having to change the way they feel, think or act (cf. James 2:19). Information transfer does not guarantee transformation in Christlikeness. Second, programs, including preaching, usually rely upon the hard work of the preparer and leave the hearers as "passive recipients of their work.... The result is usually enormous amounts of unprocessed information" (46). Ogden concludes that "the preached word needs the context of community, where meaning can be discussed and bold implications for our lives heard [cf. Keller, *Center Church*, 311]. When the worship service is over, much of what happened in worship is lost by the time people move to the patio to engage in their first conversation" (46). Third, programs by their nature tend to try and synchronize the discipleship process (47). The problem is people need individualized attention depending upon their personal knowledge, character, willingness to obey and unique ministry calling and identity. Fourth, programs typically have no mechanism for accountability: "Programs of discipleship often give the illusion of accountability. But on closer examination the focus is on completing the assigned study curriculum rather than committing to life change" (47). Ogden concludes, "Though all approaches to disciple making will have programmatic elements, such as structure and curriculum..., the growth process of the individuals is always preeminent in a relational setting" (47).

discipleship stands in sharp contrast to the “bait and switch” that comes when people think that God exists to meet their felt needs, rather than to serve him and his mission.<sup>76</sup>

The result of the seeker church approach to discipleship is actually the further devolution of the disciple-making process: “The sad reality is that a person cannot consume his or her way into being a disciple. No amount of consumption of religious goods and services, provided by well-intended church vendors can form a disciple, and the weakness of the seeker-programmatic church testifies to this fact.”<sup>77</sup>

#### The Ephesians 4 Equipping Model: Pastor as Trainer for Lay Ministry

Though Tim Keller broadly hails from the same Reformed theological perspective as Leith, he once again moves beyond Leith by recognizing that the classic Reformation model of ministry is failing in the post-Christian context of the West. As a result, in *Center Church*, Keller calls for the Church to reclaim a more biblical and balanced emphasis between the ministry of professional clergy and the laity with the former responsible for equipping the latter. The consequence is a much larger base for mission and ministry:

Under Christendom, people simply came to the church to receive the ministrations of the professional clergy. We can no longer assume that people will come. This should not be taken to imply that the ordained ministry is obsolete – by no means! It is the responsibility of the ordained leadership to build up the church and its members through

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76. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church,” 158. Quoting Darrell L Guder, Sell believes that the church marketing trend represents Christendom’s last gasping attempt to reach North American consumers: “The ‘marketing’ of the Christian faith has emerged as perhaps the dominant reaction to the end of Christendom and the perceived need to regain lost territory. The partnership of the church and state has effectively been replaced by the partnership of the church and the marketplace” (Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015], 37), in Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church,” 159.

77. Sell, “Leadership in the Missional Church,” 159. Sell notes that the results of the Willow Creek Reveal study attest to the failure of the seeker attractional model to mature believers in their faith.

the ministry of the Word and sacraments. However, one critical focus of that ministry must now be the discipling of the laity for ministry in the world.<sup>78</sup>

Keller also moves away from Leith when he asserts the laity should be trained not in the Enlightenment classroom format but in one that more closely resembles the community formation rabbi-disciple style of Jesus:

In a “classroom relationship,” students and teachers have contact with one another primarily at the level of the intellect. The teacher and his students do not live together, eat together, or have much additional contact with one another socially, emotionally, or spiritually. We do not find a classroom relationship between Jesus and his students, nor did his students relate that way with one another. Instead, he created a community of learning and practice in which there was plenty of time to work out truth in discussion, dialogue, and application. This example suggests that we best learn and apply what we are learning in small groups and among friends, not in academic settings alone. Our character is mainly shaped by our primary social community – the people with whom we eat, play, converse, counsel, and study.... In short, there is no more important means of discipleship – of the formation of Christian character – than deep involvement in the life of the church, the Christian community.<sup>79</sup>

In order for an established church to transition from the traditional Christendom model of ministry and reintroduce “movement dynamics” back into the life of the congregation, Keller calls for the pastors of the church to deinstitutionalize the ministry by equipping covenant

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78. Keller, *Center Church*, 277. Keller writes about the nature of every member missional discipleship within a missional church: “Christian mission is more than just a department of the church, more than just the work of trained professionals...every Christian is in mission.... So a Christian is not a spiritual consumer, coming in to get his or her emotional needs met and then going home. A missional church, then is one that trains and encourages its people to be in mission as individuals and as a body.... The church must not *only* be attractional; it also must equip and send the laity into the world to minister.... Missional churches must equip laypeople both for evangelistic witness and for public life and vocation. In Christendom, you could afford to train people solely in prayer, Bible study, and evangelism – skills for their private lives – because they were not facing radically non-Christian values in their public lives. In a missional church, all people need theological education to think Christianly about everything and to act with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know which cultural practices reflect common grace and should be embraced, which are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected, and which practices can be adjusted or revised” (Keller, *Center Church*, 259-260). Quoting Ryan Bolger of Fuller Seminary, Keller says that missional disciples “no longer see the church services as the primary connecting point with those outside the community. Connecting with those outside happens within the culture, by insiders to that culture who express their gospel through how they live” (Ryan Bolger, “Marks of a Missional Church,” January 11, 2006, accessed March 10, 2021, [https://thebolgblog.typepad.com/thebolgblog/2006/01/marks\\_of\\_a\\_miss.html](https://thebolgblog.typepad.com/thebolgblog/2006/01/marks_of_a_miss.html), quoted in Keller, *Center Church*, 277).

79. Keller, *Center Church*, 312-313.

partners for “lay leadership” and “lay ministry.”<sup>80</sup> Making a distinction between the two he writes that lay leaders are the “volunteers who lead and run church programs.”<sup>81</sup> Keller states that in order to “establish the missional core of a church,” the pastor should create “a particular kind of spiritual and pastoral connection between ministers and 10 to 20 percent of a church lay leaders which will result in lay leaders being empowered to do daily, informal word ministry of neighbors and friends, brothers and sisters.”<sup>82</sup>

Keller does not explain the exact nature of this “particular kind of spiritual and pastoral connection,” but it can be assumed to include various types of specialized training in ministry within a relational context. In order to further accentuate the role of lay leaders in a congregation, Keller says that a church can commission its non-ordained lay leaders and staff:

Churches that are solidly grounded in their historic tradition normally have a strong bias for the importance of the special office [of pastor]. They must actively seek to cultivate a greater appreciation for the dynamic and fluid nature of the general office. One way to do this is through the commissioning of unordained lay leaders and staff – men and women working alongside traditional ordained leaders. In this way, churches can honor both the dynamic and organizing work of the Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

Lay ministry, in contrast to lay leadership, refers to the call upon each covenant partner to engage in “every-member gospel ministry.”<sup>84</sup> This ministry usually occurs in the community or workplace outside the church’s organized programs, and it requires each person to assume “personal responsibility for being a fruit producer rather than just a consumer of ministry.”<sup>85</sup>

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80. Keller defines movement dynamics as vision, sacrifice, and flexibility with unity and spontaneity (see Keller, *Center Church*, 339-340).

81. Keller, *Center Church*, 280.

82. Keller, *Center Church*, 351.

83. Keller, *Center Church*, 347.

84. Keller, *Center Church*, 279.

85. Keller, *Center Church*, 280.

Keller explains the potential significance and influence of these everyday lay ministers:

Lay ministers are people who actively bring their Christian example and faith into the lives of their neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community. My experience has been that when at least 20 to 25 percent of a church's people are engaged in this kind of organic, relational gospel ministry, it creates a powerful dynamism that infuses the whole church and greatly extends the church's ability to edify and evangelize. Lay ministers counsel, encourage, instruct, disciple, and witness with both Christian and non-Christian individuals.... Because they are being equipped and supported by the church's leaders, those involved in lay ministry tend to feel a healthy sense of ownership. They think of it as "our church," not "their church" [referring to the ordained leaders and staff]. They freely and genuinely give of their time, talent, and treasure.<sup>86</sup>

Pastors have a key role in supporting lay ministers both by modeling themselves the behavior and activity they are asking their covenant partners to engage in and by staying personally connected to them with advice and encouragement:

There is a way to pastor that promotes this every-member gospel ministry, just as there is a way to pastor that kills it. Whatever else they do, pastors and other church leaders must be aware of the importance of lay ministry and intentional about preparing people for it. They must be personally involved in the lives of lay ministers.... This connection does not come primarily through formal, content-heavy training sessions on "how to share your faith" (though this is vital and can be very helpful...). Instead, it is formed through informal teaching and support and ongoing advice from pastors and ministry leaders. Pastors must constantly remember to encourage and push laypeople to use their relationships for the ministry of the Word.<sup>87</sup>

Like Keller, R. Paul Stevens and Frank R. Tillapaugh make similar appeals for pastors to equip the covenant partners in the churches they serve so that these congregants can identify and lead their own ministries in the church and in world.<sup>88</sup> Based upon his reading of Ephesians 4:11-12, Stevens says,

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86. Keller, *Center Church*, 280-281.

87. Keller, *Center Church*, 286. Keller shares about a pastor and his wife in London who became involved in their local public school and started a neighborhood watch program on their street. "These endeavors got them immersed into the life of the city and brought them into many relationships with their neighbors" (Keller, *Center Church*, 286). Such activity by the pastor models missional engagement for the congregation.

88. Paul R. Stevens, *Liberating the Laity: Equipping All the Saints for Ministry* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002). Frank R. Tillapaugh, *Unleashing the Church: Getting People Out of the Fortress and Into Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Publishing, 1985).

Church leadership is called *primarily* to an equipping ministry. This is not a sideline to preaching or counseling, but the *raison d'être* of the pastor-teacher.... Equipping the saints does not mean harnessing the laity for the felt needs or institutional tasks of the church nor harnessing the laity to assist the pastors within certain delegated ministries. The saints are to be equipped for their own ministry. The pastor should not be trying to replicate his or her own ministry but to release theirs.<sup>89</sup>

As with so many of the authors reviewed here, Stevens and Tillapaugh include stinging critiques for those who continue to over-rely upon large facilities and the traditional pastor-centered model of ministry.<sup>90</sup> Such dependence, they say, have a number of unintended deleterious effects on every-member ministry. Tillapaugh states,

As Richard Halverson discovered, in a congregation of over 7,000 there were only 365 jobs [to maintain the program of the church]. This seems to say that the majority of the membership of large churches feel responsibility merely to show up when the professionals are doing their thing. Lay people have been programmed to watch what is going on up front. The bigger the facility, the bigger the performance. The bigger the facility, the greater the distance between the person in the pulpit and the people in the congregation. Most of us have yet to grasp the consequences of the church's gravitation toward the superstar mentality. The evangelical performance has become the norm.... What a shame that in a day when our cities cry out for the touch of Christ, when they so need our evangelical people "out there," that Christians sit week after week in their pews, mesmerized by one big performance after another.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to Leith, Keller, Stevens and Tillapaugh make a strong biblical and practical case for pastors to serve primarily as equippers for those under their care. However, they fail to

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89. Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, 34.

90. Stevens writes, "The notion that one person could so embody the charismatic gifts of ministry for the church that he or she might be called *the minister* is not only a practical heresy. It is an affront to the intention of the Head Equipper" (Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, 36). Tillapaugh adds: "The biggest obstacle to unleashing the church is not rural psyches, entrenched lay-power structures, lazy, unmotivated people or small facilities. It's the senior pastor.... It is the senior pastor who sets the tone and direction of ministry.... There is something woefully stifling to the ministry of the church when its people constantly get the message, 'I am the pastor.'... Not many churches have a 'pulpit-master.' If they do, in many ways they are truly fortunate. The people in such a church can be sure that they hear the Scripture taught with unusual depth and power Sunday after Sunday. Their pastor is likely to be an influential voice across America and around the world. They will gain an appreciation for the significance of God's Word that is sadly lacking in any churches. The danger in such a case, however, is the temptation to 'sit and soak' under the teaching of the 'pulpit-master' rather than seeking one's own ministry. A teaching ministry that is truly effective will encourage lay people to listen to God's call and become involved in ministry themselves" (Tillapaugh, *Unleashing the Church*, 102-105).

91. Tillapaugh, *Unleashing the Church*, 91-92.

include a clear and specific approach for how a pastor can train disciples to make other disciples. Tillapaugh devotes entire chapters of his book, *Unleashing the Church: Getting People Out of the Fortress and into Ministry*, to the nature of ministry to singles, international students, senior adults, the homeless, and middle-class family members, but at no point does he suggest any actual informational content or format for this equipping that could help train a follower of Jesus regardless of their station in life. Similarly, Stevens, in his *Liberating the Laity: Equipping All the Saints for Ministry*, includes broad sections on topics like “Cultivating Depth with God” and “Discerning What is True,” but he neglects to include practical steps for how a pastor can cultivate these spiritual disciplines in others.<sup>92</sup>

Keller likewise has a marvelous chapter in *Center Church* on “Equipping People for Missional Living” in which he extols the virtues and wide ranging contours of lay ministry in the world, but he does not offer or refer to a detailed plan of action for how to disciple these disciplers.<sup>93</sup> He, like Stevens and Tillapaugh, is seemingly akin to numerous other missional church authors who assert the crucial nature of missional disciple making, yet fail to include much of the specialized instruction needed to see this happen.<sup>94</sup> Even the prominent missional

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92. Tillapaugh and Stevens were some of the early writers from the 1980s to early 2000s who tried to encourage the church to move from a delivery model of ministry to an equipping model. Another book from this era is Sue Mallory and Brad Smith, *The Equipping Church Guidebook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); see also Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]). Like Tillapaugh and Stevens’s works, Mallory and Smith view much of the call to an equipping culture through an attractional church lens. As a result, a great deal of the focus is on the staff equipping lay “volunteers” to help with the church’s programming. Evidence of this are the many examples of “volunteer interview” sheets and other surveys found at the end of the book which are filled with service opportunities to extend and maintain a church’s many programs (ex., music librarian, Sunday greeters, blood drive workers, small group leaders, etc.). None of these forms include “discipler” or “discipling equipper” as one of the options among the many samples that are offered. There is also no mention of training to live a missional lifestyle.

93. Also, Keller’s discussion of “movement dynamics” in part 8 of *Center Church*, which includes a chapter on “Church Planting as a Movement Dynamic,” does not mention a self-replicating missional discipleship movement as a key and essential element within a church plant for it to be an effective gospel-centered congregation.

94. For other examples of missional church authors who, to one degree or another, call for a disciple-making process to be at the heart of a missional church and yet do not offer a thorough approach themselves for

church author Alan Hirsch, who contends that a self-replicating discipleship movement is the key element of the missional DNA of the Church, outsources the disciple-making task by referring his readers to another writer, his friend and colleague Neil Cole, for an effective disciple-making methodology.<sup>95</sup>

After engaging with the authors reviewed in this section of the literature review, along with other works that advocate for a “pastor as equipper” model, a pastor might certainly be inspired to adopt an equipping philosophy of ministry. However, he or she may also feel frustrated because of a lack of practical direction. Pastors who are convinced that the mission of the church is to make disciples and who desire to initiate a missional discipleship movement within the congregation they serve will probably need to turn to another subset of writers who will be surveyed in the final portion of this section of the review. These authors also contend that the primary calling of a pastor is to serve as an equipper for the covenant partners in their church, but they combine this contention with specific and practical advice for how to initiate a missional discipleship movement as a sodalic form in the life of a congregation. These movements are typified by a process in which disciples are trained to self-replicate. The differences between these authors lie mostly in the detail of the training processes they recommend.

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developing followers of Jesus, see Reggie McNeal’s chapter “The Return to Spiritual Formation,” in *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 69-91, and his chapter “Program Development to People Development,” in *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 89-110). Also, see Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2008); and Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006). Other missional church authors who do not mention intentional disciple-making at all include Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, *The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2013); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000); and Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, and How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009).

95. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 104-105.

## The Multiplication Model: Pastor as Initiator and Steward of a Self-Replicating Missional Discipleship Movement

In contrast to Leith who seems to stop at the Reformation and Christopher Beeley who appeals to the Patristic Fathers for their models of pastoral ministry, the authors who will be reviewed in this section of the literature review make an explicit attempt to reach further into Christian history for their prototypes of pastoral leadership and disciple making. Looking back to the examples of Jesus, Paul and the NT and pre-Constantinian Church, these authors embrace the “pastor (and staff) as equipper” model, but then go on expressly to extend the ministry of disciple making to all the covenant partners of a congregation.

As opposed to some other missional authors who tend to focus almost exclusively on the church’s evangelistic presence in the community, the authors reviewed here consider disciple making to be *the* foundational element of the DNA of a missional church. Writing from this perspective, Breen offers a gentle chastisement to the “missional church” movement for its apparent willingness to speak about the missional impulse of the church without a concomitant discussion of discipleship:

For several years now, “missional” has been the buzzword in and around the church. People want to create missional churches or missional programs or missional small groups. The thing is, we don’t have a missional problem in the Western church. We have a *discipleship problem*. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission. Always. Somewhere along the way, we started separating being missional from being a disciple, as if somehow the two could be separated.<sup>96</sup>

Alan Hirsch echoes Breen’s call for the Western Church to recover the crucial ministry of disciple making. This he says is one of the “forgotten ways” of the early Christian movement:

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96. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 5-6. Breen wrote a widely circulated critique of the missional church movement entitled “Why the Missional Church will Fail.” His key point is that without an effective plan for making disciples, missional movements are unsustainable. Mike Breen, “Why the Missional Movement Will Fail,” ChurchLeaders, last updated March 4, 2021, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/154332-mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail.html>.

Discipleship and disciple making is perhaps the most critical element in the mDNA. This is so because it is the essential task of discipleship to embody the message of Jesus.... When dealing with discipleship, and the related capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus, we are dealing with the single most crucial factor that will in the end determine the quality of the whole – if we fail at this point then we must fail in all the others. In fact, if we fail here, it is unlikely that we will even get to doing any of the other elements of mDNA in any significant and lasting way.<sup>97</sup>

Hirsch intensifies his argument by commenting on the specific nature of the disciple-making task. He says that disciple making must be done in a way that allows potentially any believer to disciple another believer. In other words, reproduciveness must be a part of any discipleship strategy. When disciple makers are able to replicate the life of Christ they have in others, the capacity for a disciple-making *viral* movement results:

Only to the extent that we can develop self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted disciples can we hope to get the task of Jesus' mission done. There is no other way of developing genuine transformational movements than through the critical task of disciple making. Or as Neil Cole wryly notes: "If you can't reproduce disciples, you can't reproduce leaders. If you can't reproduce leaders, you can't reproduce churches. If you can't reproduce churches, you can't reproduce movements."<sup>98</sup>

Ed Stetzer makes the same point that for missional movements to occur strategies for disciple making and church planting must be accessible and reproducible:

Movements do not occur through large things (big budgets, big plans, big teams). They occur through small units that are readily reproducible. If you want to see a movement,

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97. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 102. Hirsch quotes C. S. Lewis in this same regard: "If the Church is not [making disciples], then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible, are a waste of time" (W. Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis* [Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004], 167, quoted in Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 102). Hirsch claims to have found the "central guiding mechanism...for the reproduction and sustainability of genuine missional movements (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 283). He terms this mechanism the church's "missional DNA" or "mDNA." The elements of Hirsch's mDNA are: Jesus is Lord, Disciple-Making, Missional-Incarnational Impulse, Apostolic Environment, Organic Systems, and *Communitas*, Not Community (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 24-25). Taken collectively, these elements form what Hirsch calls the "Apostolic Genius" of the Church (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 78.)

98. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 119. A number of missional authors are looking to the field of virology to understand spontaneous church planting and disciple-making reproduction. These authors note that viruses carry a simple DNA which makes them easy to spread and reproduce exponentially. See for example, the section called "Viruslike Growth" in Hirsch's chapter on "Organic Growth" in *The Forgotten Ways* (207-212), including his illustration entitled "Sneezing the Gospel" (211). See also Greg Ogden's analogy of cell reproduction and growing a multigenerational network of disciples in *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 173-174.

things need to be accessible and reproducible at every level. Accessible means that the average person can understand and participate in the vision without any advanced knowledge or special training. Reproducible means that the concepts are reduced from complexity to simplicity to virally spread. This is a challenge to resist the grandiose in favor of the reproducible.<sup>99</sup>

Breen, Hirsch, Stetzer and other missional authors maintain that for a missional movement to occur a leader must focus first on the most granular level of transformation – that of the discipleship formation of an individual believer. In recent decades, more and more literature has been produced that seeks to offer pastors practical strategies for how to disciple followers of Jesus in a way that will initiate a missional disciple-making movement. Though these writers differ to some degree in the details of their approaches to the disciple-making task, they do offer the leader a number of viable options from which to choose as he or she considers which strategy might best serve their ministry context. In this next portion of this review section, the disciple-making methods of Greg Ogden, Mike Breen and Neil Cole will be reviewed.

### Ogden's Micro Group Strategy

As with the other authors reviewed here, except for Leith, Greg Ogden firmly believes that the primary role of a pastor is to equip those whom he or she serves so that they may fulfill their own ministry callings.<sup>100</sup> Commenting on the implications of Ephesians 4:11-12, Ogden

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99. Ed Stetzer, “10 Characteristics of Movemental Christianity: Moving from addition to reproduction,” *Christianity Today*, June 14, 2017, accessed November 12, 2020, [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/june/10-characteristics-of-movemental-christianity.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/june/10-characteristics-of-movemental-christianity.html). More and more missional church authors are beginning to describe the Church of Jesus Christ in terms of movement dynamics rather than in static institutional terms. The word that some of these authors have coined to describe the church in this way is “movemental.”

100. Before his retirement from Fuller Theological Seminary where he was the Academic Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Associate Professor of Lay Equipping and Discipleship, Greg Ogden served for 23 years as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA). “I believe the closest thing to a job description that is given for the pastoral role is Ephesians 4:11-14 and that it defines the fundamental posture and purpose for pastoral ministry” (Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 131). Ogden considers Elton Trueblood’s statement as the best definition of the role of a pastor: “The ministry is for all who are called to share in Christ’s life, *the pastorate is for those who possess the peculiar gift of being able to*

states, “The equipping pastor initiates the maturing of the body by assisting the people of God to practice the ministries to which they are called. In other words, equipping pastors deploy their gifts in such a way that the members of the body discover and are developed in accord with their God-ordained function in the church and world.”<sup>101</sup>

With Breen and Cole, Ogden believes that the key to disciple making is life investment in the context of relationship.<sup>102</sup> In his *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples as Few at a Time*, he defines discipling as “an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.”<sup>103</sup> The words he selects for his definition point to a number of important aspects for his understanding of the disciple-making process. “Intentional” relates to the fact that participants meet on a regular schedule, usually weekly. “Walk along other disciples” conveys the idea that the relationships within the group are nonhierarchical. He says, “The intent is to create a mutual, egalitarian interchange, where life rubs up against life.”<sup>104</sup> “To grow toward maturity in Christ” indicates that the goal of a discipling relationship is not merely to master information but to become whole and complete

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*help other men and women to practice any ministry to which they are called*” (Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship* [New York: Harper and Row, 1967], 41, quoted in Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 133).

101. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 133.

102. “Ninety percent of believers have never had someone take them under their wing and make sure that the basic disciplines, doctrines, character qualities, or ministry issues have been inculcated in their lives. This occurs when someone invests himself in the life of another to guide him into the breath of the new life in Christ” (Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 151).

103. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 124; cf. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 3.

104. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 124. Ogden eschews the notion of a master leader or teacher (what he calls the “Paul-Timothy model”) in favor of a peer-mentoring approach illustrated by Barnabas and Paul’s relationship. It appears that in some instances in the Book of Acts, Barnabas is the lead actor in their ministry together (Acts 13:2, 7; 14:12, 14; 15:12, 23) and in other places it is Paul (Acts 13:42, 46, 50; 14:1; 15:2, 22, 35).

in Christ.<sup>105</sup> Finally, “equipping the disciple to make disciples who make disciples” makes it clear the ultimate goal of the process is reproduction: “Included within our understanding of maturity is that the disciple has internalized the value of multiplication and gained the confidence and ability to lead someone to Christ and walk alongside that person toward Christlikeness.”<sup>106</sup>

The basic discipleship unit that Ogden proposes is what he calls “micro groups.”<sup>107</sup> These are made up of a convener who invites two others to join together with him or her in a “triad” for a journey in Christian maturation by working through the twenty-five sequential topics provided in Ogden’s discipleship manual, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*.<sup>108</sup> To ensure a higher level of accountability, participants sign a mutually agreed upon covenant. At the conclusion of the experience, those who have been discipled are asked to find and disciple two others. In this way, Ogden maintains that a church can be organically transformed into a disciple-making congregation in just a few years.

The keys to a successful micro group are a convener who models transparency and a relational environment that creates the “four ‘climactic conditions’” that allow for growth: “When we (1) open our hearts together in *transparent trust* to each other (2) around *the truth of God’s Word* (3) in a spirit of *life-change accountability* (4) while engaged in our *God-given mission*, we are in the Holy Spirit’s hothouse of transformation.”<sup>109</sup>

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105. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 125.

106. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 126.

107. The following details about micro groups come from the “Leadership Guide” at the end of *Discipleship Essentials*, 221-233.

108. The topics in *Discipleship Essentials* are arranged in the curriculum into five sequential categories: Making Disciples, Spiritual Disciplines, Understanding the Message of Christ, Becoming like Christ and Serving Christ. These topics include: Quiet Time, Bible Study, Prayer, Worship, Sin, Grace, Redemption, the Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Love, Justice, Ministry Gifts, and Financial Stewardship.

109. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 145. Ogden explicates these environmental conditions for discipleship in pages 145-163.

In his chapter “Practicalities of Disciple Making” in *Transforming Discipleship*, Ogden offers practical wisdom for a pastor or any mature Christian leader who may believe they are called to initiate a missional discipleship movement in a congregation. First, he advises starting with one triad rather than many.<sup>110</sup> Starting small will mitigate against the natural tendency of a large, established church to morph the life-on-life disciple experience into an information-driven program:

A multigenerational network of discipleship may seem to have meager beginnings if it starts with one discipling micro group. But you have to begin somewhere and get beyond the need to have a big splash that will lead to instantaneous change. Quick fixes have led to the discipleship morass we are in. Even though the need for discipling will run way ahead of your ability to meet it in the short run, remember that programs have failed to deliver the necessary life change over time.<sup>111</sup>

Ogden believes that using a discipleship tool like *Discipleship Essentials* in a triad offers pastors a unique opportunity to share their high level of training in a way that is impactful both for those he or she may be discipling as well as for the pastor him or herself:

Let me for a moment speak particularly to pastors or Christian leaders whose professional role it is to pass on “the good deposit of the gospel.” I have for a long time felt that we are an underutilized resource because we generally have not had the means to pass on the content of our theological training through the filter of our life experience. By mastering a discipleship tool (like *Discipleship Essentials*) we give ourselves a theological grid through which to pass our storehouse of knowledge. A discipleship group provides us the incentive and context to tuck away in our own hearts “the good treasure entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14).<sup>112</sup>

Second, Ogden encourages those who are leading the missional discipleship movement to have an extended vision for the future:

Start building a network of disciple making. Fight every impulse in your being that says, “We must see results by next month (or even in the next six months).” Intentionally growing people takes time.... A growing discipleship network is like yeast slowly

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110. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 174.

111. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 175.

112. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 175.

penetrating the dough, causing it to rise almost imperceptively.... It takes up to five years before critical mass has been reached. As I said before, it takes less than 20 percent of a congregation to set the pace for the rest. A small percentage of value holders determine what a church or ministry is all about. At the five-year mark there are so many stories of life change, and so much buzz about what these triads have meant to those involved, that people will beg for the opportunity to become a part of these groups.<sup>113</sup>

For pastors who wonder whether they have five years to effect the transformation of their churches, Ogden has a special word:

If you are a pastor reading this book, do you want to measure your ministry by the number of sermons preached, worship services designed, homes visited, hospital calls made, counseling sessions held, or the number of self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus? I reiterate, the church is in its resent predicament because we do not have enough leaders who have the vision to think small.<sup>114</sup>

Third, Ogden advises the pastor to very carefully select who will be a part of their initial micro groups:

The key element in growing a multi-generational network of disciple making is to start with the right people.... I would begin with the most well-grounded and respected followers of Jesus in your community. In addition, they should be stable members of your community. In other words, look for people who have a good chance of staying around for a while.<sup>115</sup>

Ogden recognizes that leading a small micro group represents a significant investment in a pastor's time. This makes choosing the right participants for their micro group all the more critical:

You want to ensure as much as you can, a return on your investment. When you spend approximately a year with two or three others, you want to know that this was worthwhile. You are trying to see people become self-initiating followers of Jesus, and you also want them to adopt a lifestyle of reproduction. You are growing disciple makers. Those who are well grounded and stable, who have already demonstrated that they are dependable, reliable and faithful, are your best bet for replication.<sup>116</sup>

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113. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 177.

114. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 177.

115. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 177-178.

116. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 178.

Ogden concludes his revised and expanded edition of *Transforming Discipleship* with a new chapter for the pastor concerning the place of preaching in the disciple-making mission of the church. After contrasting the differences between what he calls a “discipleship gospel” and “non-discipleship gospel,” Ogden challenges pastors to make Jesus’ call to follow him the heart of their messages on Sunday mornings:

Preachers in disciple-making congregations need to see themselves as more than careful expositors of God’s Word, as important as that is. They are the vision casters for disciple making, which is backed up with their life investments as personal disciple makers. They lead the disciple-making strategy and view preaching as one significant component in this process.... Preaching sets the tone for discipleship. Preaching is not for the faint of heart, because we will be unmasking idols, messing with people’s priorities, and calling parents to be model disciplers of their children, even while we are on the journey with them.... If the mission of the church is to make disciples who reproduce, then the congregation should sense that this conviction oozes from every pore of the preacher.<sup>117</sup>

### **Breen’s Huddle and Missional Community Strategy**

As with Ogden, Mike Breen seeks to offer pastors and other Christian leaders the practical tools they need to initiate a viral, mission discipleship movement among the people they serve. Much of Breen’s approach is consistent with that of Ogden’s, however, they do differ in at least two ways. First, in contrast to Ogden who posits the work on disciple making in what Harrington and Absalom call the “Transparent” context of three or four believers, a context that mirrors the relationship that Jesus had with his closest disciples, Peter, James and John, Breen

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117. Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 198-199. Over the last several decades the missional church discussion has produced a concomitant debate over the nature and content of the Gospel. Ogden and others note that the traditional North American evangelical gospel has tended to focus on what some call a “forgiveness only” Gospel that can be summarized in four parts: “God loves you. You messed up. Jesus died for you. Accept Jesus into your heart” (Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 73, quoted in Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 190). The focus of this understanding of the Gospel is on receiving the benefits of what Jesus has purchased on the cross. The result of this Gospel presentation is the unintended perception that one can be a Christian without also being a disciple. Ogden counters this presentation of the Gospel with one based upon Mark 1:14-15 that calls people to join Jesus’ life, join Jesus’ community and join Jesus’ mission (195-196). See also, Scot McKnight and Becky Castle Miller, *Following King Jesus. How to Know, Read, Live and Show the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 17-19, and Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached We Must Follow* (Nashville: HIM Publications, 2018).

focuses on the “Personal” and “Social” contexts for disciple making.<sup>118</sup> This dissimilarity with Ogden comes from Breen’s contention that the disciple-making process should not be solely embedded within the deep and intimate relationships of a few but within the larger “texture” of a “family on mission” in which discipleship is seen as a way of life in community and not merely a curriculum, class or program.<sup>119</sup> The organized expression of family on mission for Breen is Missional Community (MC). There is no mention of MCs or any other sodalic structures as a way of reaching individuals and neighborhoods in Ogden’s writings.

Second, Breen believes that the discipleship process should not be led by egalitarian-minded facilitators or conveners but by identifiable leaders who have been coached and trained to make other leaders using Breen’s approach to discipleship.<sup>120</sup> The key to a self-replicating, viral missional discipleship movement for Breen, then, is the development of leaders who can both lead others in the disciple-making process and who can guide MCs where this discipleship happens.

Breen contends that three things must be present in the life of a congregation in order to create a missional discipleship culture.<sup>121</sup> The first is a “discipleship vehicle” which operates in a “Personal” context and approximates the rabbi-discipleship experience of that of Jesus and his twelve followers. Breen calls his discipleship vehicle a “Huddle”:

A Huddle is the group of four to ten people you feel God has called you to specifically invest in, and you will meet with them regularly (at least every other week) to intentionally disciple them in a group setting. The best discipling relationships always

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118. See Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*, 52-54.

119. Mike Breen and Sally Breen, *Family on Mission: Integrating Discipleship into the Fabric of our Lives*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2018), introduction.

120. Breen writes extensively about creating and multiplying leaders through “leadership pipelines.” For example, see Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2012), 59-100.

121. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54.

have an intentional “organized” component to them, as well as a less formal, “organic” component. Having a regular Huddle meeting is the organized component.<sup>122</sup>

The second component of a missional discipleship culture is an orb of relationships where people are allowed to have access to the Huddle Leader’s personal and community life. This is the “Social” context in which discipleship occurs through community, mission and practice. The goal here is to recreate the biblical experience of *oikos* or what Breen calls, “Family on Mission.”<sup>123</sup> Missional Community (MC) is the organized vehicle for training in *oikos*.<sup>124</sup>

Breen identifies five characteristics which must be present in an effective MC: twenty to forty people who create a “house party” dynamic which allows for “semi-anonymous space in the community for people to hang out on the margins and observe before they move in closer for more in-depth participation”; a clear mission vision for impacting their community; a lightweight and low-maintenance organizational structure that is “inexpensive to run, not too time-consuming to plan, and not bound by building or maintenance costs”; an accountable leader or group of leaders who are held accountable and supported by a central church; and a rhythm of relational interaction that focuses on “growing in relationship with God (UP), with one another (IN), and with those they are reaching out to (OUT).”<sup>125</sup> Huddles are embedded within MCs in order to provide training in disciple making and MC leadership.

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122. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 55.

123. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54.

124. Breen’s primary text for understanding and launching Missional Communities is *Family on Mission*.

125. Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 8-10. In another place, Breen offers a more extensive definition of MC: “A Missional Community is a group of 20 to 50 people who exist, in Christian community, to reach either a particular neighborhood or network of relationships. With a strong value on life together, the group has the expressed intention of seeing those they are in relationship with choose to start following Jesus through this more flexible and locally incarnated expression of the church. They exist to bring heaven to the particular slice of earth they believe God has given them to bless. The result is usually the growth and multiplication of more Missional Communities. These MCs are networked within a larger church community allowing for both a scattered

The third element that must be present to create a missional discipleship culture is a consistent discipling language. The language Breen offers is called “LifeShapes.”<sup>126</sup> These are a series of simple, geometric shapes that help to teach and remember key leadership and discipleship principles from Scripture.<sup>127</sup> The LifeShapes are taught, practiced and debriefed in Huddle over the course of around thirty meetings.

One of the LifeShapes teaches that missional disciples are called to order their lives around a rhythm of relationships that Jesus embodied.<sup>128</sup> Breen calls this rhythmic pattern “UP, IN and OUT.”<sup>129</sup> “UP” refers to one’s connection with the Father in worship and His Word. “IN” relates to the connection believers have with other believers in fellowship, and “OUT” denotes a Jesus follower’s connection with the world in mission. Another LifeShape, based on Mark 1:15 and called the “Learning Circle,” prompts believers to discern and articulate answers to what Breen, Cole and others consider to be *the* essential discipleship questions: “What is God saying

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and gathered church. These mid-sized communities, led by laity, are ‘lightweight and low maintenance’ and most often meet 3-4 times a month in their missional context. Each MC attends to the three dimensions of life that Jesus himself attended to: time with God (worship, prayer, scripture, teaching, giving thanks, etc.), time with the body of believers building a vibrant and caring community, and time with those who don’t know Jesus yet.... They [are] small enough to care [and] large enough to dare.... When this scattered church of Missional Communities gathers together as one large family, it is a picture of the coming Kingdom, or as Newbigin would say, ‘a sign, instrument and foretaste. Every color, age, race and religious background’ (Mike Breen, “What is a Missional Community?” December 31, 2010, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable)).

126. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54.

127. “The eight shapes of LifeShapes help us connect the dots between Jesus’ kingdom principles and living our everyday lives in ways that honor him. These shapes paint a clear picture through which we can better understand what God intends to do in our personal lives, in the church, and in the world” (Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad, *A Passionate Life* [Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005], 33).

128. Chapter two of this thesis-project notes that in early chapters of the synoptic Gospels a rhythmic pattern of behavior is readily seen in the life of Jesus. He would begin his day in prayer (Luke 6:12), gather his disciples around him (Luke 6:13-16), then invite them to engage in ministry and mission (Luke 6:17-19). Later in the day he would debrief their experiences with them (Luke 10:17).

129. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 91-110.

to me and what am I going to do about it?”<sup>130</sup> Huddle participants are then asked to create and share an accountability plan with the rest of the group for how they will do what God is asking them.

The 3DM organization which Breen founded to promulgate his missional discipleship approach in North America and beyond offers a variety of training opportunities for those interested in learning his method. Among these is the “Learning Community” (LC) which is a “two-year intensive training process for team leaders who want to learn how to build a discipling culture that produces a missional movement to reach the lost and change the world.”<sup>131</sup> These LCs gather five times over two years for intensive three-day immersions along with a weekly online Coaching Huddle. 3DM says that the goal of the LC training is to “learn how to build an extended Jesus-shaped family on mission as the context for discipleship, and how to become part of a Kingdom movement that goes beyond our own local church or organization.”<sup>132</sup>

As a byproduct of the LC training, Breen and the 3DM team produced and published a series of books that are designed to help church leaders navigate toward a missional discipleship culture. The primary text for this process is “*Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a*

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130. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 70. Although Ogden does not refer to these discipleship questions, they do seem almost ubiquitous among discipling writers and practitioners. In *Discipleship that Fits*, Alex Absalom says that a “disciple is an intentional learner from Jesus. Thus the two questions of discipleship are: 1. What is Jesus saying to me? 2. What am I doing in response?” (17). Question number ten in the Character Conversation Questions on Cole’s Life Transformation Group Card reads: “Did you finish the reading and hear from God? What are you going to do about it?” (Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (n.p., CMA Resources, 2014), 119. Much like Breen’s Learning Circle, Don Everts, Doug Schaupp and Valarie Gordon in *Breaking the Huddle: How Your Community Can Grow Its Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016) offer the “Discipleship Cycle” as their basic discipleship tool. They assert that the structure of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) gives insight into Jesus’ method for life change: “We hear [Jesus’] words, we respond to those words, and we debrief the words/response with others. This communal, responsive handling of God’s words is what makes us ‘good soil’ that is transformed because of those words – producing crops.... [Jesus] did all this *in community*. It’s really very simple. And quite profound. The process of hearing and responding to God’s words in community is what makes Christians (and whole Christian communities) grow and move and change” (98).

131. “Learning Community: Our Primary Vehicle,” 3dm, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.3dmovements.com/l-c>.

132. “Learning Community,” 3dm, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.3dmovements.com/whatislc](http://www.3dmovements.com/whatislc).

*Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did* which includes the LifeShapes and practical instruction for how to start a Huddle. Breen strongly cautions against church leaders striking out on their own to start their own initial Huddles. Instead, he encourages church leaders to contact 3DM which offers coaches who already have been through the Huddle process.<sup>133</sup>

Like Ogden who calls for pastors to transition their personal leadership styles toward more of an equipping model, Breen asks church staffs as a whole to change the focus of their activity from ministry delivery to consumers to cultivators and resource persons for leaders/fruit-bearers:

The major transition in the role of staff is the change from being paid providers who do everything to enablers of others so they can play their part. The staff's energy will less and less be put into running meetings and far more into building a discipling lifestyle. Staff stop being the hired holy hands and start focusing on resourcing and serving those reaching out through Missional Communities. The mindset shift is one that sees staff becoming a highly skilled resource to help MCs grow in number and depth, so they make and sustain breakthroughs and do only what can't be done by MC members.<sup>134</sup>

Breen presses on to say that mission involvement should be a part of the job description for staff in larger churches:

Before this sounds totally deconstructionist, we definitely believe in churches having staff, but the challenge is to what end they are there.... A good challenge to a church (especially with a larger staff team) is for the staff to be released to spend time outside the church building in mission. This should not be seen as something they do in their part time, but rather something that they do as a part of their role. Such an approach would

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133. "My advice is to resist the urge to start a Huddle because you've read this material on how to lead one. The only way to lead a Huddle successfully is to first be in one. My experience is that people often assume that if they can read a book on the matter or have a short conversation with someone, they can now perform what they've just read or heard about. There are times when this is true and times when this isn't true. Leading a Huddle is a time when you will need more than a book to help you develop the necessary skill-set. In the same way that you would not want a person performing open heart surgery on you because they once read a book on it, our position is you wouldn't want someone discipling you and shaping you to be like Jesus because they read a book on it.... You want someone who has been discipled in how to disciple!... If you are in a church that doesn't have Huddles yet and you'd like to pioneer that in your context, our movement offers coaching Huddles at 3DM that you can be a part of" (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 191).

134. Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 68.

speak volumes to the church community, as well as encouraging staff to keep on developing their skill set, experience and confidence on the front lines.<sup>135</sup>

Likewise, hiring decisions should be made with an eye toward the missional purpose of the church to make missional disciples:

Will a new hire make the church more centrifugal, enabling it to GO with the Gospel more effective? Or will the new position be centripetal, pulling energy, resources, and people into the center, for the sake of maintaining what goes on there?... The point is that the center exists to serve the edge, not the other way around. The staff (and the building and photocopier) are there to help the “regular” members of the church who are leading in mission to be as well-resourced and supported as possible.<sup>136</sup>

### Cole’s Life Transformation Group Strategy

Like Ogden, Neil Cole focuses on the “Transparent” context for his approach to disciple making. The heart of his strategy is what he calls “Life Transformation Groups” (LTGs) which for him offer a simple and yet effective way to reproduce disciples. In his *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups*, Cole says that LTGs are made up of two or three people, all of the same gender, who meet weekly for personal accountability for their spiritual growth and development.<sup>137</sup>

Like Huddles, LTGs do not grow by adding new participants. Instead, Cole recommends that a group multiply into two groups of two once the fourth participant has proven faithful to the process.<sup>138</sup> Unlike, Ogden and Breen, Cole does not provide a defined multi-week discipleship curriculum. Instead, LTGs meet indefinitely for about an hour each week and participants confess their sin to one another in mutual accountability. They also read Scripture and pray for

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135. Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 69.

136. Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 69.

137. Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 54.

138. Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 54.

specific non-believers.<sup>139</sup> As non-believers come to faith as a result of these prayers, they are added to form a new LTG. In this way multiplication occurs naturally and spontaneously.

Cole extols the power of LTGs to evangelize communities:

The LTG system is simple, yet powerful. It incorporates the values of community, life transformation and reproduction of disciples. At our church there is a place for anyone who wants to grow in Christ. There is no need for a new Christian to wait for a class to open. There is no ceiling to the care we can offer because the groups can multiply quickly and easily to accommodate any number the Lord grants us.<sup>140</sup>

Applying his “fractal” theory from church planting to discipleship multiplication, Cole maintains that his LTGs are an effective and biblical strategy for evangelism and discipleship:

A small reproducible pattern that allows every disciple to make other disciples almost immediately and that connects people to the Master Himself is a potent catalyst for apostolic movements.... [An LTG] is that. Ultimately every church is only as good as her disciples. We need a simple disciple-making tool that has a small enough pattern to easily reproduce disciples life on life.<sup>141</sup>

Cole’s LTGs offer a number of strengths *vis-à-vis* Ogden’s micro groups and Breen’s Huddles for missional disciple making. First, in contrast to Breen’s model, they are simple, inexpensive and easy to lead without much training beforehand. Even a new believer can soon become an integral part of the leadership of an LTG. For Breen, Huddles are about investing in future leaders, not leading someone to Christ. Also, his method strongly encourages the employment of a 3DM coach to help these mature participants master the extensive material and group dynamics required to lead future Huddles. For large churches this expense may not be an issue, but for smaller churches it may be.

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139. Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 54.

140. Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 60.

141. Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2010), 182.

Second, new believers do not have the Scriptural background and probably the character formation necessary to enter into the Huddle process. Only mature believers who have been identified for their character and capacity for future ministry leadership should be invited to participate in Huddles and early micro groups. Every LTG meeting, however, involves direct prayer for individuals who have been prioritized for conversion. When these converts come, they are quickly assimilated into the life of the group. For all of these reasons, Cole's LTGs are much more evangelistic in nature than Huddles and micro groups.

Smaller groups like LTGs and micro groups make it easier to maintain confidentiality. It is also much easier to share difficult discipleship topics in smaller groups than in larger ones. A smaller number of participants with fewer calendars make meetings easier to schedule as well.

At the same time, Cole's strategy may be perceived as less than optimal in at least two regards. For some it may feel too redundant given that the format centers around just a few participants repeating a simple format on a bookmark every week (albeit with new Scripture texts). In some ways, LTGs are reminiscent of the early Methodist accountability groups. Also, leaders of large churches may be impatient with the small scale (three people) in which Cole suggests starting. This is in contrast to Breen who believes that six to eight persons can be included in a congregation's first Huddle. The implication is that the Huddle system may offer the possibility of faster movement growth.

### **Aligning the Mission and Ministry of a Congregation: Transformational Elements for Initiating and Stewarding Adaptive Change**

The third section of this literature review will consider the works of a number of authors who may assist an associate pastor in his or her desire to bring the historic congregation they serve into greater alignment with its own mission and strategy statements and with Christ's

biblical vision for leadership in his Church. Special concern will be given to identifying and learning how to introduce transformational ideas and strategies into the life of a church while recognizing that the associate pastor is doing so from a “second” or “third chair” position. The specific goal of this section will be to discern what particular change strategies need to be embodied and employed by the pastoral change agent in order to initiate a missional discipleship movement within the life of a church. The insights of these various authors will be organized around a series of transformational elements that can be identified from within their writings.

#### Anticipate the Potential Grief Associated with Transformation

Leadership author Max De Pree states, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”<sup>142</sup> As noted in chapter one of this thesis-project, every measurable indicator of organizational health shows a diminishment in adherence and cultural influence of the Church in the Western world. Despite this wide-ranging evidence, many leaders who have experienced the privileged position of the Church in the past may be hesitant to acknowledge the Church’s loss in cultural impact. This includes leaders of large congregations in the Southeast United States that are presently remaining steady in terms of giving, attendance and campus development. Large churches that are in the short term out-competing other smaller congregations in the church marketplace for covenant partners may begin to feel that they are impervious to the long-term changes around them.<sup>143</sup> Other reasons for this denial range from pride to bewilderment to grief.

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142. The full quote reads: “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader” (Max De Pree. *Leadership Is an Art* [New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2004], 11).

143. “Large churches with large resources are able to [compete for a finite constituency] very well. This enables them to increase their market share of the spiritual goods and services offered to a consuming public while the smaller churches struggle to keep people from leaving for the bigger churches’ more polished products” (Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 17.)

“A church bred under the protection of the state is not trained to fend for herself on the streets.

So when state and society withdraw their special favor towards the palace-trained church, it gets a very rude awakening. Disorienting and painful, it can lead to despair, anger and denial.<sup>144</sup>

Kenneth J. McFayden, Professor of Ministry and Leadership Development at Union Presbyterian Seminary, borrows from the field of attachment theory to suggest that transformational pastors should help other leaders and congregants see change through the lenses of grief and loss – the loss of influence, ownership, structure, familiarity, place and identity.<sup>145</sup> He maintains that transformational leaders should anticipate these reactions by preparing themselves to help those they serve to grieve their losses and to communicate to their churches a strong, positive and biblical vision for how God is calling the congregation into the future. In his *Strategic Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future*, McFayden acknowledges,

Change is difficult. It challenges the adaptability, flexibility, and resilience of congregations in a rapidly changing world. On the verge of change, leaders cannot command members to go *from*. They can invite members to *come to* and, at their best, they can assist members in finding the inspiration needed to manage the pain of change. Ideally, inspiration comes as members and leaders discern how God is calling and leading

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144. Steve Yamaguchi, “From the Palace to the Streets,” accessed March 11, 2021, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/from-the-palace-to-the-streets/>, quoted in Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 193.

145. Kenneth J. McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future* (Herndon, VA: Alban Books, 2009), 16-19. McFayden alludes to two popular maxims for leadership in his book. The first relates to the delicate art of calibrating the pace of change in an organization like a congregation: “Leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb” (Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* [Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002]). McFayden cautions leaders: “Differing perceptions of the pace of change can put leaders in a bind, as some regard their leadership as effective while others see it as ineffective” (McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change*, 15). The second maxim also comes from Heifetz and Linsky’s, *Leadership on the Line*: “People do not resist change, *per se*. People resist loss” (11). McFayden refers to this quote in order to ask pastors not to immediately attribute resistance to change to mere personal intransigence or fear but to grief: “Rather than focusing on positions and sources of resistance, we see others as individuals suffering loss. As we empathize with them in their loss, we quickly see that each resisting person is a *grieving person*” (McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change*, 22).

the congregation forward, and as they respond to “the call to change” as a call to faithful following.<sup>146</sup>

The key point here is always to associate the transformation with a clear, evocative and compelling vision of where God is calling the congregation rather than merely proposing the change as a potential solution to a problem.<sup>147</sup>

### Return to an Apostolic Approach to Pastoral Leadership

Given the dramatic changes in the Western Church’s current cultural milieu, a number of missional authors have begun to advocate for a renewed approach to pastoral leadership that recognizes the Church is now in a missionary context and that asks pastors to develop their capacity to lead their congregations through transformation while remaining open to personal change themselves.<sup>148</sup> With this culturally attentive understanding of pastoral leadership, these writers also call for a concomitant change in the way that pastors function within the lives of their churches. Greg Ogden, in his critique of the Christendom leadership style, asserts,

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146. McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change*, 19.

147. McFayden points his readers to the work of John Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2012) who say that: “People change what they do less because they are given *analysis* that shifts their *thinking* than because they are *shown* a truth that influences their *feelings*” (1). Because of the evocative nature of change, McFayden encourages leaders to “be attentive to four sets of behaviors based in people’s emotions.... Complacency, driven by false pride or arrogance; Immobilization, self-protection, a sort of hiding in the closet, driven by fear or panic; A-you-can’t-make-me-move defiance, driven by anger; Constant hesitation, driven by a pessimistic attitude” (McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change*, 18).

148. For example, Tod Bolsinger says, “Traditional churches will only become missionary churches as those in authority (and even those without formal authority) develop capacity to lead their congregations through a long, truly transformational process that starts with the transformation of the leaders and requires a thoroughgoing change in leadership functioning. To be sure, in the Christendom mental model under which most of us were trained, pastors weren’t missionaries and churches weren’t missions.... We were teachers, worship leaders and counselors. We were social workers, community organizers and program providers. We were mostly chaplains for a congregation within a Christendom culture. For many of us in midcareer, it’s like we woke up one morning and found ourselves ministering in a cross-cultural setting where we don’t understand the customs, language or values. We are now in uncharted territory facing the same adventure-or-die moment. And if traditional churches are going to become missionary churches, then pastors must become truly missional leaders of missional *communities*” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 39).

The roles of pastor that were formed and honed under the Christendom model no longer work in our day. The church in friendly culture was essentially a maintenance institution that passed on the faith intact from one generation to another. Today we must turn the church paradigm inside out and move from maintenance to mission. This means that the roles of pastors must change to lead this change. Any time there is a shift in ministry model, there will be a commensurate shift in role expectations, which will lead to role confusion as the paradigms of church are changing.<sup>149</sup>

In a similar fashion, Tod Bolsinger, Presbyterian pastor, Vice President for Vocation and Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary and author of the book *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, calls Western Church leaders to shift from a posture of settled maintenance to one of active engagement with the culture around them. This new disposition is not an innovation but in fact a renewed return to a model that is centered in God's mission to the world and rooted in NT and early Church leadership practices:

In a Christendom context the leader's primary responsibility was to bring a people *back* to God, *returning* to the church, *turning back* to the values they had strayed from. Preaching reiterated the shared story, the shared vision of life, the shared values of a culture they had once learned and now forgotten. It reminded us of what most in our culture already knew and even mostly believed.... *But what kind of leadership do we need today in a culture that has become again a mission field?* What does leadership look like in a day when the moorings of society have become disconnected from the anchors of faith? What is leadership in a world where the task isn't so much to remind as to encounter and engage, to proclaim and demonstrate a completely different world that is available and yet beyond awareness of or even interest to so many?... Ironically, it looks a lot like the earliest church leadership.<sup>150</sup>

To elucidate this renewed model of leadership, Bolsinger directs his readers to the work of Alan Hirsch and others who have sought to recover the original nature of the Church as an “apostolic movement” that is nurtured by an APEST equipping model of leadership found in Ephesians 4:1-16.<sup>151</sup> J. R. Woodward terms these apostolic equippers as “cultural architects”,

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149. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 123.

150. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 17-18.

151. See Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012). Referenced in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 38. “Many of the problems the church now faces can be resolved simply by thinking differently about it and its God-

stating, “If we are to cultivate mature communities of faith, we need missional equippers who live as cultural architects, with a heightened sense of contextual awareness and the ability to shape and cultivate culture within the congregation.”<sup>152</sup>

Similarly, R. Paul Stevens calls pastors to be “environmental engineers” who are able to shape a congregation’s philosophy of ministry in response to its particular mission.<sup>153</sup> Bolsinger himself uses the phrase “transformational leader” to describe the kinds of pastors the Church in the West needs to lead her through the current uncharted cultural territory in which she finds herself.<sup>154</sup> No matter how their role is termed it is clear that many North American pastors will have to learn and embody a new set of ministry skills in order to help their congregations faithfully navigate the future ahead.

### Honor the DNA of the Congregation

Church transformation authors repeatedly emphasize that any attempts at transformation should always be a healthy adaption of the church’s dearly held internal values. Bolsinger

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designed mission in the world. By changing our metaphors, or paradigms of church, we can change the game. The name we give to this different paradigm of church is simply *apostolic movement*. It is not new – in fact, it is ancient – and it is the only way to describe the fluidity and dynamism of the spiritual phenomenon we see evidenced in the New Testament itself. In short, apostolic movement involves a radical community of disciples, centered on the lordship of Jesus empowered by the Spirit, built squarely on a fivefold ministry, organized around mission where everyone (not just professionals) is considered an empowered agent, and tends to be decentralized in organizational structure” (Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, xxxv).

152. J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 61.

153. “The task of church leaders is to shape the environments. They are the environmental engineers.... The message the church conveys by its environment communicates more clearly than any formal public announcement” (Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, 33).

154. In *Canoeing the Mountains*, Bolsinger uses the story of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their search for a water route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean to illustrate the challenges and opportunities for North American church leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Lewis and Clark experienced an adaptive challenge when they reached the Rocky Mountains and discovered that they would have to abandon their boats for horses to make it through the uncharted terrain. With a pregnant Native American teenager named Sacagawea as their guide, they were able to journey to the Columbia River and change the course of United States history.

advises that if the experiment strays too far from the DNA or “code” of the congregation, it will probably encounter unsurmountable resistance:

Interventions must not violate the code of the church.... Be clear on what will never change before you start messing with stuff. To be a true adaptive experiment, interventions must be aligned with the church culture and reinforce the church core ideology; they must be *expressions* of the church’s values, mission and primary strategy. If the leader uses the intervention as a way of getting through a personal agenda, all trust will be lost and all future experiments will be stopped before they start.<sup>155</sup>

In a similar fashion, Kevin G. Ford, in his *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to the Great*, warns transformational leaders about “tinkering” with a congregation’s deep sense of identity:

Your members will resist change that is in conflict with the church’s code. But they will also resist change if they don’t perceive that leaders are intentionally preserving the church’s code. By discovering and preserving your church’s code, you will give your members a sense of safety so that they will be more open to change. In other words, they resonate with the church’s code at a subconscious level. People will be more open to change if they know that you understand and value who they are – even if they are not conscious of their own connection to the code.<sup>156</sup>

So, for example, if biblical authority is at the center of a church’s DNA, then any experiment must be accompanied by an extensive Scriptural rationale. Missional church writers generally do not say they seek innovation but a return to the original patterns of NT and early Church leadership. So, for example, Ogden phrases his call for a return to a biblical equipping model for pastors “The New Reformation.”<sup>157</sup> In other places he speaks of “completing the Reformation” where Protestant Churches in the West finally break from the Roman Catholic

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155. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 120-121. The DNA of a congregation is its “defining essence” or “code.” Bolsinger states, “When describing a church’s DNA, we are talking about the particular pieces that make up the church’s identity and mission – the critical elements that make a congregation who they are. It includes elements like core values, essential theological beliefs, defining strategy and mission priorities” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 104).

156. Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2007), 76.

157. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 9. Ogden’s previous edition of *Unfinished Business* was originally entitled *The New Reformation*.

clerical model of pastoral ministry and “deliver on their promise of the priesthood of all believers.”<sup>158</sup>

Likewise, Hirsch urges a “Great Recalibration” in which the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church is renewed by and aligned with a biblical vision of the ‘Church as movement’ and where an APEST model of leadership is released to thrive:

In the end, all renewal in the church comes down to a question of biblical and theological legitimacy. We are authentically “church” when we are most aligned with the original and originating understandings of the church, namely that of a transformational movement. For the church in any age, the New Testament form (movement) remains the primordial template of the church which tests all others. In negotiating our way forward, we must first and foremost be sure that we are properly aligned with God’s original intent and design. Our primary, authoritative text – the Bible, chiefly through the lens of the New Testament – will help us to realign, reassess, and redirect our efforts. All our greatest truths are not new – they are remembered, recovered...retrievals, and so we don’t need to invent a ministry that fits our culture, we simply need to recover that ministry that has already been given.<sup>159</sup>

Transformational leaders should also take care, if possible, to posit the experiment as an attempt to advance the congregation’s strategic mission plan. Again, the goal is alignment rather than innovation.

### Become a Skillful Transformational Change Agent

Borrowing extensively from the insights of Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, John Kotter and other writers from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, Bolsinger provides a model of transformational leadership that encourages the pastor to function in three overlapping

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158. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 60.

159. Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (Atlanta: 100 Movements Publishing, 2017), xxix. To buttress his argument, Hirsch quotes the twentieth-century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr: “The great Christian revolutions came not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when someone takes radically something that was always there” (Hirsch, *5Q*, xxx).

areas of competence.<sup>160</sup> The first is “technical competence.”<sup>161</sup> This involves a faithful stewardship of the Scriptures and of the core values and beliefs of the church that gives it its identity.<sup>162</sup> Bolsinger says, “Since successful adaptive change is always a healthy adaption of the DNA of an organization, for pastors who want to lead a congregation in change the most important thing to remember is the first step is getting clear on what will *never* change.”<sup>163</sup>

Technical competence also relates to the pastor’s ability to lovingly shepherd the souls of those under his or her care and to competently manage the institutional requirements of the church: “Pastors of congregations need to be both personal and organizational.”<sup>164</sup> As a pastor demonstrates competency in these things, he or she will gain the professional clout needed to lead the church forward through the transformation process.

Bolsinger calls the second competency “relational congruence.”<sup>165</sup> Credibility is built in this area through consistent behavior that demonstrates care and character. He defines relational congruence as “a leader’s ability to be the same person in every setting, every relationship, every

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160. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43. See Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002; Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Press, 1994); Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009); John Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2012); and John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

161. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43.

162. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 55.

163. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*. 55. Bolsinger adds this from Heifetz: “Most real change is not about change. It’s about identifying what cultural DNA is worth conserving, is precious and essential, and that indeed makes it worth suffering the losses so that you find a way to bring the best of your tradition and history and values into the future” (Ronald A. Heifetz, “Leadership, Adaptability, Thriving,” *Faith & Leadership*, October 14, 2008, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://faithandleadership.com/ronald-heifetz-leadership-adaptability-thriving>, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 55). Appealing to the seventeenth-century Reformed theological maxim, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei* (“the church reformed, always being reformed according to the Word of God”), a phrase that would be very familiar to John Leith, Bolsinger reminds his readers that all innovations in church leadership forms must be tested by and rooted in the Scripture.

164. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 56.

165. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

task. The personal maturity and emotional stability to make calm, wise decisions creates the necessary health and trust in an organization that enables it to “let go, learn as you go and keep going.”<sup>166</sup>

As a pastor functions in a relationally congruent manner, he or she will develop a higher level of trust among those they lead. Patrick Lencioni, in his *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, says that trust is the fundamental element that must be present in order for a team to work together cohesively.<sup>167</sup> He affirms Bolsinger’s contention that trust is built over time through consistent, vulnerable behavior that demonstrates that the leader’s intentions are honorable: “Vulnerability-based trust cannot be achieved overnight. It requires shared experiences over time. Multiple instances of follow-through and credibility, and an in-depth understanding of the unique attributes of team members.”<sup>168</sup>

Bolsinger says the third area of leadership competency is “adaptive capacity.”<sup>169</sup> Heifetz, Linsky and Grashow define adaptive capacity as “helping individuals, organizations, and communities deal with...tough questions, distinguishing the DNA that is essential to conserve from the DNA that must be discarded, and then innovating to create the organizational adaptability to thrive in changing environments.”<sup>170</sup>

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166. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

167. Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 195. “Trust is the confidence among team members that their peers’ intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another” (195).

168. Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 197.

169. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

170. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 23, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 89.

For Bolsinger, adaptive capacity is the “crucial leadership element for a changing world.”<sup>171</sup> It involves “*leading the learning process* of a group who must develop new beliefs, habits or values, or shift their current ones in order to find new solutions that are consistent with their purpose for their being.”<sup>172</sup> Whereas technical challenges can be solved through existing skills and information, adaptive capacity requires that the leader learn and change in order to fulfill the mission.<sup>173</sup>

To develop his or her adaptive leadership capacity, a pastor must first understand that the goal is not to fix the presenting problem but to enter into a learning process so that the real issues behind the symptoms can be seen.<sup>174</sup> Turning once again to Heifetz, et al., Bolsinger says the heart of the work of an adaptive leader is the repeated sequence of a three-step process: “Adaptive leadership is an iterative process involving three activities: (1) observing events and patterns around you; (2) interpreting what you are observing (developing multiple hypotheses about what is really going on); and (3) designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified.”<sup>175</sup>

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171. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 90.

172. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 111.

173. “The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems.... While technical problems may be very complex and critically important...they have known solutions that can be implemented by current knowhow. They can be resolved through the organization’s current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to thrive anew” (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 19). “*What makes a problem technical is not that it is trivial; but simply that its solution already lies within the organization’s repertoire.... [Adaptive challenges, on the other hand] cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge and skills, requiring people to make a shift in their values, expectations, attitudes, or habits of behavior*” (Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 11, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 41-42.)

174. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 111.

175. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 32, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 111.

Collecting observations involves “getting on the balcony” of an organization or system and gathering as many objective data points as possible about the situation.<sup>176</sup> The interpretation phase will find the leader looking for formerly undetected patterns of behavior that are driven by unseen values and loyalties. The goal of the interpretation stage is to detect and draw attention toward what Bolsinger calls “competing values.”<sup>177</sup> Once these are detected and discussed, church leaders can then reframe the presenting issue so that it can be addressed with new interventions.<sup>178</sup>

### Embody the Change

Throughout the transformational process, the pastor should not only serve as an objective observer but as a lead subjective participant as well. Following other adaptive change authors, Bolsinger emphasizes that actual transformation must start with the leader him or herself:

Leadership into uncharted territory *requires* and *results* in transformation of the whole organization, starting with the leaders. If we want the organizations and communities we serve to thrive, focus on what God needs to do in *you*, change in *you*, makeover in *you* so he can use you in his mission. Focus on how you need to grow in technical competence, relational congruence and adaptive capacity, and especially focus on what you need to leave behind, let go and even let die so your church can become more and more effective at fulfilling its part in God’s mission. Don’t focus on whether your church is dying, keep your focus on being transformed into the leader God can use to transform his people for his mission.<sup>179</sup>

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176. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 112.

177. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 119.

178. “Note that competing values are difficult to navigate because each is *valuable*. These values serve the current church system, express what is truly treasured (not ideals or aspirations) and have been reinforced for a long time. At the same, because the values are competing, the tension and stuckness they cause also reinforces the status quo. Eventually, the only way to move forward is for the leadership to intentionally make one of the competing values more of a priority than the other. But at this stage of the process, even raising the reality and reframing the church problem as an issue of competing values will help refocus the leaders on looking for new, adaptive interpretations” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 119).

179. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 217. Most adaptive change writers like Bolsinger appeal to the groundbreaking work of rabbi and therapist Edwin H. Friedman for their understanding of the emotional processes associated with leadership. Friedman calls for leaders to be self-differentiating within the emotional systems of

Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, in their book *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically from the Inside Out*, say with Bolsinger that transformational leadership is fundamentally a spiritual matter involving the death of the pastor to God's Lordship over his or her life. "Leadership, in one very profound sense, is simply being willing to lead by going first. We need crucified leaders that will demonstrate what it means to die to themselves – their personal ambitions, hopes, dreams, and provisions – and allow Christ to rule in the new reborn life."<sup>180</sup>

Halter and Smay maintain that one of the most profound and practical implications of this death of the leader will be how the pastor decides to spend his or her time. For those pastors who believe that their most important calling is to disciple other leaders and to reach the unchurched, they say these leaders may have to redirect their time from other things:

Remember that deeper discipleship can't happen from the pulpit or through church programs. It seems to happen best when a leader gives someone personal time. For this reason, pastors and church leaders must assess their ability and their willingness to redistribute their time so they can be available for personal discipleship.... We have to restrict our time so we are working either with other leaders or the unchurched. We work with other leaders so that they will be able to make disciples, and we work with the unchurched so they will get started on the pathway to discipleship.<sup>181</sup>

Halter and Smay state that their highest commitment as pastors is to the time they devote for leadership equipping and disciple making:

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which they are a part: "Rather than being concerned with the size of an organization or its product, or the latest fad of reorganization, the important criteria have to do with a leader's capacity to avoid being regulated by an institution's emotional processes as they are transmitted and reinforced from generation to generation. A leader must separate his or her own emotional being from that of his or her followers while still remaining connected.... Chronic criticism is, if anything, often a sign that the leader is functioning better" (Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Never: Leadership in an Age of the Quick Fix* [New York: Church Publishing, 2017], 20).

180. Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 28.

181. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 86. Halter offers practical advice from one of his own time commitments as pastor: "Every year I invite about twenty people into a leadership mentor group. I choose people who I know have huge capacity, but for whatever reason they seem stuck in nowhere land. I meet with them once a month for eight months, and every time they come alive and begin to take their calling and lives more seriously" (Halter and Smay, *AND*, 110).

Remember the great leadership principle: ‘To whatever you give your leadership, it will grow.’ If you give your time to working with your staff to prepare a great weekend church service, you’ll probably have one.... If you want to see people go beyond the Sunday service experience and learn to be like Jesus, you will need to give the time you used to give to preparing for that, to this new goal. In other words, if you want your people to someday take ownership over your church’s future and partnership in leading and caring for people, you’ll need to shift your focus and redirect your time to help them. Our recommendation is that your official training times and coaching of your people need the highest investment in time and energy.<sup>182</sup>

Ogden presses the need for transformation even deeper into the pastor’s own emotional life. Noting the emotional dependency ministry models to which most leaders adhere, he calls for pastors to reconsider their emotional rewards systems and then, like Halter and Smay, to align their schedules based upon equipping priorities:

To shift to an equipping model, pastors must change their emotional reward system. Instead of finding their fulfillment in their own doing of ministry, the satisfaction must come in assisting others to blossom to their ministry potential.... An inordinate amount of time is spent with emotionally dependent people, and minimum attention is given to stronger, more mature believers who could be motivated and trained to minister to the care needs that take so much of a pastor’s time. As long as pastors are available, to all comers rather than strategically using their time to build up and deploy people in ministry, the body will remain dependent.<sup>183</sup>

A pastor’s emotional rewards system invariably will be built upon his or her own sense of identity as a leader. If a pastor and the covenant partners see him or her as the institutional locus of ministry in the congregation, then the pastor will perpetuate a co-dependent arrangement in which congregants express their need for the pastor to “feed” them spiritually and the pastor responds affirmatively to this arrangement because of his or her own need to feel needed.<sup>184</sup> To ensure the spiritual growth of those whom they lead, Ogden says a pastor must embrace a new joy and identity as an equipper-multiplier:

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182. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 118-119.

183. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 121.

184. “An institutional understanding of the church leads directly to a dependency model of ministry, whereas an organism understanding of the church leads directly to an equipping model of ministry” (Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 111).

Equippers prepare, complete, put in order, and make ready for service the people of God. Equipping is not so much about the functions of a pastor, but it is about the results of deploying an increased number of God's people in ministry. It is really a question about *whose ministry it is*. Equippers for ministry find their fulfillment and joy in seeing the people of God come alive to their ministry potential.<sup>185</sup>

Ogden quotes R. Paul Stevens to remind his readers the highest calling of a pastor is to point the people he or she leads not to themselves but to Christ:

Their [human equippers'] major function is not to make people dependent upon the leaders but dependent upon the Head. This is the highest possible calling. It requires the strongest possible leadership in the church to lead people in such a way that they do not become dependent on the human leaders.... Equipping, directing people to find their life and future in Christ Himself, makes the highest claim on leadership.<sup>186</sup>

Paul Sorenson, former executive pastor at Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona, one of the preeminent attractional churches in North America in the 1990s, testifies to his own transformational journey as a leader as a part of CCOJ's change from a program delivery model to a congregation focused on missional discipleship:

I realized change had to start with me. It has been painful. I had to let go of my tendency to control others. I have had to learn how to build leaders rather than maintain a program. I'm still in process, for sure, but now other leaders are learning how to equip people as well. We've moved away from a program focus and toward a discipleship emphasis. The seeker model was the right model at one time.... But that model was no longer effective in fulfilling our mission. We had to change. We had to sacrifice a model of ministry in order to gain a way of life.... Community has become more than a stated value...[it] is becoming the fabric of our lives.<sup>187</sup>

Sorenson reflects John Stott's comments on Ephesians 4:11-12 where Stott calls for pastors to form their identities as ministry multipliers rather than as ministry deliverers:

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185. Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 155.

186. Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, 37, quoted in Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 146.

187. Ford, *Transforming Church*, 53. For two accounts of how large attractional churches in North America were transformed from an attractional to a missional discipleship equipping model see Walt Kallestad, "Showtime! No More," *Leadership* [Fall 2008], accessed December 12, 2012, [www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2008/fall/13.39.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2008/fall/13.39.html) (Kallestad was the long-time senior pastor of Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona); and Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2011), the co-pastors of Oak Hills Church in Folsom, California.

The New Testament concept of the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all lay initiatives, but of one who helps and encourages all of God's people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts in a world of alienation and pain. Thus, instead of monopolizing all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministries.<sup>188</sup>

### Lead an Intervention

Popular leadership author John Kotter says that organizations change when "a powerful person at the top, or a large enough group from anywhere in the organization, decides the old ways are not working, figures out a change of vision, starts acting differently, and enlists others to act differently."<sup>189</sup>

Though it is true that transformation can come from any angle from within an organization, Bolsinger recommends caution when introducing transformational elements into an existing church. He asserts that when a pastor initiates an intervention, he or she should posit it as an oblique experiment on the edges of the church's life rather than as top-down requests for change from the center of the church's governance structure:

Interventions should start out modestly and playfully. The early experiments should not cost a lot of money, disrupt the organizational chart, upset the center of the church life too much or be taken too seriously yet. They should instead be opportunities to try some things and see how the system reacts. In short, when intervening in the system, there needs to be a clear sense that *learning* is the goal, that we are not making any big, permanent changes yet but simply trying out some ideas to see what we will find.<sup>190</sup>

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188. John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 167, quoted in Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 155.

189. John Kotter, "The Key to Changing Organizational Culture," *Forbes*, September 27, 2012, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.forbes.com/sites/johnkotter/2012/09/27/the-key-to-changing-organizational-culture](http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkotter/2012/09/27/the-key-to-changing-organizational-culture), quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* 80.

190. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121.

Cole and Hefler echo Bolsinger's call to avoid experimenting at the center of the church's leadership structure. Cole notes that when he introduced transformation to an established congregation he served, he intentionally chose *not* to start with his elders.<sup>191</sup> Instead, his first involved people who needed dramatic life change. Later, as the elders witness the benefits of this disciple-making project, they became motivated and asked to join the new initiative.

### Transfuse a Sodalic Church Form

While Bolsinger offers a variety of examples of transformational experiments, other authors write more specifically about adaptive interventions that are intended to initiate missional discipleship movements within the culture of an existing congregation. They term these interventions in different ways, but their consistent intent is to introduce a small sodalic form of church life into the larger modality so that exponential change may eventually occur. For example, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay call them "pilot communities."<sup>192</sup> Neil Cole opts for the phrase "skunk works project."<sup>193</sup> Like Bolsinger, Cole recognizes that the challenges before the Western Church are not technical problems but adaptive dilemmas that must be addressed at the most cellular level of a congregation's life:

The problems our churches face in the West are not structural, strategic or mechanical. A mechanical fix is not a fix at all. The problem is a lack of life in the core, or perhaps a more diplomatic way to describe it is lack of healthy DNA. So every transformation

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191. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 150.

192. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 68.

193. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 136. The phrase "skunk works project" comes from the aircraft manufacturer Lockheed Martin's World War II Skunk Works project in which in 1943 it designed and delivered the U.S. Air Force's first jet fighter, the P-80 Shooting Star, in 143 days. A skunkworks project is generally developed by a relatively small and loosely structured group of people who research, develop and produce a project primarily for the sake of radical innovation. See "The Skunk Works® Legacy," Lockheed Martin, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/who-we-are/business-areas/aeronautics/skunkworks/skunk-works-origin-story.html](http://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/who-we-are/business-areas/aeronautics/skunkworks/skunk-works-origin-story.html).

begins not with a structural change but with a transfusion of holistic and healthy disciples infused with the DNA.<sup>194</sup>

Rather than using Bolsinger's more surgical "intervention" language, Cole speaks of a viral "transfusion" of healthy DNA into the life of a congregation via a small group of individual covenant partners who have been discipled in a Life Transformation Group. The result is a reproduction movement of this healthy DNA throughout the rest of the church:

You can't conduct surgery in every cell of your body. You can't just take a pill and hope that that will fix things. The healthy DNA must infiltrate every cell for the body to become healthy. And in the same way, every disciple in the church must have the complete DNA within if we hope to resurrect the body to become a healthy organic church.... If we could somehow fix someone's DNA, I would imagine we would need a more viral approach that brings change one cell at a time. To do that you would first need to introduce a healthy DNA cell that is capable of reproducing. The change would be microscopic and slow to begin with, but as each generation of transformed cells reproduced, it would build momentum and change would eventually be noticeable.<sup>195</sup>

Cole affirms Bolsinger's aversion for top-down change strategies and calls for the "skunk works project" approach as a slow yet ultimately more effective way to achieve transformation:

We have found that a systematic corporate change launched all at once from the top down tends to diffuse any real impact and does little to actually transform a church or its people. Such a scenario may bring about programmatic change, but it will not be internal, grassroots and organic. That is why we suggest you launch a skunk works project on the side. It will allow the change to come from the people rather than the pastoral staff alone. You are far more likely to get buy-in on a smaller scale at first and then see sustained progress as more and more people adopt the new ideas.<sup>196</sup>

Cole and other missional authors acknowledge that healthy organizational alignment may come from the top of an established modality when senior leaders set the context for transformation by giving permission, endorsing the vision and allocating resources for transformation to occur. However, movement and actual transformation always comes from

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194. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 26.

195. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 27.

196. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 137.

below at the sodalic, grass-roots level. Cole reiterates the viral, relational nature of true, deeply embodied transformation:

As a leader of your church, you can always cast vision for change, but the actual implementation may require a slower and smaller start if it is to yield holistic transformational results. Any true organic change must be internal, relational, and advance virally – like a contagion from one person to the next. We believe that this requires that you start small with a unique group and let its influence spread. A skunk works approach is the best way to initiate this sort of transformation.<sup>197</sup>

Halter and Smay follow Bolsinger and Cole's advocacy for initiating a transformational missional discipleship movement in an established congregation by gathering a small number of high-capacity believers in the church into intentional community (sodality) and then letting them share their testimony with the rest of the congregation:

An existing church must first gather bands of missional people out of the larger body, bring them together, and then begin the process of engagement. All you need is a handful of people who want to pilot an incarnational community.... Eventually the stories of the missional communities will filter up into the general church population and begin perking [sic] curiosity and stirring up more buy-in for the next wave of would-be missionaries and missionary communities.<sup>198</sup>

As a suggestion for how to gather an initial group of participants, Halter and Smay encourage leaders to form a book club with covenant partners and to read together either their *The Tangible Kingdom* or Reggie McNeal's *The Present Future*.<sup>199</sup> When the book study concludes, the most interested participants are invited to consider a pilot community who will take twelve months to explore missional and incarnational ways of living.<sup>200</sup>

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197. Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 137.

198. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 68.

199. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). Reggie McNeal. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

200. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 68.

Like Bolsinger and Cole, Halter and Smay believe that the “pilot” approach for introducing change in an established congregation works well because it presents the idea of incarnational community simply as an experiment.<sup>201</sup> For those who are starting a missional discipleship movement from within a traditional church context, they urge patience for leaders as they “begin a faithful process of piloting missional, incarnational communities within your exiting church structure.”<sup>202</sup> The idea is to quietly build missional infrastructure and grassroots momentum without unnecessarily alienating “late adopters” in the congregation who may not be open to participating in such change.<sup>203</sup>

Breen goes into even more practical detail than Cole, Halter and Smay concerning how to launch his pilot Huddles and Missional Communities into the life of a congregation as a transformational strategy. Indeed one of the strengths of his material is the in-depth experience he offers to those who would adopt his approach to missional discipleship and leadership.<sup>204</sup> For established churches with no existing Huddles, he recommends that a trained coach from 3DM lead a group of six to ten high-capacity congregational leaders and staff (including at least one pastor) through the Huddle experience where they can be discipled to lead their own Huddles in the future as well as to launch their own MCs. At some point in the training, these leaders are then released to prayerfully choose other covenant partners in the congregation to Huddle. From this initial launching point (a single sodality), the missional discipleship process can begin to multiply throughout the rest of the congregation.

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201. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 68.

202. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 71.

203. Halter and Smay, *AND*, 71.

204. One of the many places where Breen includes a great amount of practical wisdom for starting Huddles and Missional Communities is in the section entitled “Launch Guide: Tactical Maneuvers” in his and Alex Absalom’s *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (76-121). This section of the book includes a nine-step process for initiating MC pilot groups.

## Understand the Viral Nature of Movements

A number of missional authors have taken the social science work of Everett M. Rogers and Malcolm Gladwell to develop a theory related to the manner and pace at which churches change when receiving new ideas. Cole notes Rogers' findings in his *Diffusion of Innovations* which theorizes that there are five different groups of people in relation to the innovation process: 1) innovators; 2) early adopters; 3) early majority; 4) late majority; and 5) laggards.<sup>205</sup> Based on Rogers' research, Cole states, "In a typical population, innovators represent only 2.5 percent, early adopters are around 13.5 percent, the early majority weigh in at around 34 percent, and the late majority are about the same. The laggards are around 16 percent of any populace."<sup>206</sup>

Taking Rogers' research and the popular writing of Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson argue that once the innovators and early adopters embrace the new idea there will be a point when it will be inevitable in the rest of the organization.<sup>207</sup> That "tipping point" is sixteen percent.<sup>208</sup> Cole, Hirsch, Ferguson and other missional authors believe that this social science theory of information dissemination can provide a "road map" for pastors who feel called to bring transformation to the congregations they serve: "start with the innovators, and once you get the

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205. Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995), 280-281, referenced in *Transfusion*, 147.

206. Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 147.

207. Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 100. See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 196-203.

208. Hirsch and Ferguson, *On the Verge*, 196.

early adopters, you will have enough motivation and momentum to eventually change the whole system.”<sup>209</sup>

The key for pastors initially is to identify the innovators in their congregations as potential participants in the intervention and to avoid late adopters and laggards who can be invited to come along later. In a large church, identifying innovators may be difficult for an associate pastor who is tied to a narrow, programmatic segment of the congregation’s ministry. In this case, the pastor must simply find ways to connect with a significant swath of the congregation so that those who are “wired” for experimentation and risk are identified and cultivated. Involvement with the new covenant partner orientation process is one way to identify these entrepreneurs. Writing about leading transformation in his own congregation, Bolsinger shares how he and the leadership of his congregation identified the innovators in their midst: “We also didn’t expect any of our long-term members who had strong connections to change anything. Instead we started some short-term groups, studies and gatherings aimed at connecting people during life transitions.”<sup>210</sup>

Appealing to the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leavened Bread, Cole and Hefler also make the case that congregational transformation should start out in a seemingly small and slow fashion:

For transfusion to occur, two different cultures must be present simultaneously. The newer culture should eventually win over the previous one, not in a violent coup but rather in a progression in which health eventually overcomes sickness. We believe the best sort of change will start gradually and will build momentum over time. A little leavening leavens the whole loaf. A more abrupt and violent transition at the start can create much havoc and may not be necessary. In essence, we are suggesting that you allow some members to pursue a reimagined picture of what life in Christ can be like, let them taste it and tell about it, and over time many others will start to move in that

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209. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 148.

210. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121.

direction.... Leverage the new success discovered in the skunk works to lift the whole church.<sup>211</sup>

Their contention is that transformation will spread virally throughout the rest of the congregation as lives are changed through the disciple-making process:

As people in your church continue in relationship with those who are changing, ideas, insights, and experiences will be shared. It's these unscheduled and unscripted moments that ultimately produce change. Focus on the life and health of the disciples, not the accomplishment of some other goal, whether it be a new church or outreach or anything else. As people learn to follow Jesus, their changed lives will be naturally contagious.<sup>212</sup>

For Cole and Helfer, the secret of church growth is not in the polished programmatic activities of the church or the cajoling of a pastor, but in the DNA of the individual disciple whose life has been changed:

Most of the literature on revitalization of churches stress that outreach is important and then the prescription that follows is usually to cast vision, teach and preach, telling stories of successful evangelism and provide training and new strategies. We pastors try to woo, inspire, challenge, guilt, and shame people into mission, and in the end we see little done. I do none of those things, and the result is tons of mission.... It is not the model of doing church that accounts for this extraordinary reproductive capacity.... Our secret is not in the mode, the agenda, the vision, the strategy, or the leadership. *You will find the secret in the disciples themselves - in the DNA....* We all say we want spontaneous growth, but too often we do not see it happen because we are putting more faith in our strategies,

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211. Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 149. See Matthew 13:31–33. Caesar Kalinowski advocates for the same “start small and slow” strategy in his *Small is Big, Slow is Fast: Living and Leading Your Family and Community on God’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014): “Bigger. Faster. Louder. That pretty much sums up the American life.... Unfortunately, this pattern of thinking has seeped in and infiltrated our methods of being the church, making disciples, or even starting new faith communities.... Intuitively we seem to believe that in order to have a successful new church, it is best to start off like a shotgun blast: have lots of people in an opening “event” (bigger is better), work hard to get to multiple services and/or locations (as fast as possible to justify the expenses we are incurring), and make sure you have enough marketing (louder) to keep a steady stream of folks coming through the doors to add to the membership rolls.... But there is a huge problem with this way of thinking when it comes to the kingdom of God and the making of disciples. In all of these things - and it seems to go completely against our instinct - small is big, slow is fast. And multiplication wins. Every time” (17-18).

212. Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 149-150. Cole makes this same point in *Church 3.0*: “Before we can change the world, we must be able to change a life. We must change a life in such a way that the same life is able to do it all over again with someone else. This is best done in small ways that eventually affect the world. If you are looking to spread an idea virus by coordinating larger groups to do so, the whole process breaks down. If it is as simple and small as one life to another, the virus can spread easily, with every person carrying the contagion.... Why is small so big? Small does not cost a lot. Small is easy to reproduce. Small is more easily changed and exchanged. Small is mobile. Small is harder to stop. Small is intimate. Small is simple. Small infiltrates easier. Small is something people think they can do. Big does not do any of these things. We can change the world more quickly by becoming much smaller in our strategy” (173).

sermons, methods, conferences, and passionate appeals to allow for what really causes spontaneous growth to occur. In fact, much of our current methodology not only doesn't produce spontaneous growth but works against it.<sup>213</sup>

Interestingly, the DNA to which Cole and Hefler refer is described in remarkably similar ways by almost all missional church authors. In their chapter on "Movement Intelligence," J. R. Woodward and Dan White, Jr., say,

Movement occurs when we answer our call to live in *communion* with God, and out of the overflow of our life with him, we live into our sentness as a *community*, carrying out his *co-mission* to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of his kingdom in ever-expanding geographical areas (Acts 1:8). Movement occurs when the making of mission-shaped disciples – who live in the world for the sake of the world, in the way of Christ – goes viral. Movement is about developing structural systems that catapult people into mission, where reproducing discipleship groups, missional communities, churches and networks of churches is a natural part of its DNA. It's the ripple effect: throwing a rock into a pond creates one ripple and then another and another, till ripples cover the whole pond.<sup>214</sup>

"Communion," "community" and "co-mission" is another way of expressing Breen's "UP," "IN," and "OUT" and Cole and Helper's "divine truth," "nurturing relationships," and "apostolic mission." All of them contend that as followers of Christ embody an integrated rhythm of this DNA into their lives a viral missional movement will result.<sup>215</sup>

### Live into the Paradoxes of Associate Pastor Leadership

There does not appear to be a great deal of literature written directly for associate pastors who seek to be transformational leaders in their congregations.<sup>216</sup> One of the few authors who

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213. Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 156, emphasis mine.

214. J. R. Woodward and Dan White, Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 23.

215. For more examples of how various missional authors describe the irreducible spiritual DNA of the Christian faith, see Appendix C, "The Irreducible Spiritual DNA of Believers, MCs and the Church."

216. In years past, seminarians and newly ordained associate pastors might be given Lyle E. Schaller's *The Senior Minister* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) to read so that they could understand their work and role expectations from a senior pastor's perspective. Schaller was one of leading consultants in the 1980s and 1990s for

does write to address some of the distinctive issues that are inherent in an associate pastor's leadership role is consultant, coach, and speaker Mike Bonem. In 2005, he and Roger Patterson wrote *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* where they defined a second chair leader as "a person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value through the organization."<sup>217</sup> In that work they identify some of the unique tensions that associate pastors face calling them "the three apparent paradoxes of second chair leadership: *subordinate-leader*, *deep-wide*, and *contentment-dreaming*."<sup>218</sup> Bonem and Patterson assert that to be an effective second chair leader, the associate pastor will need to "live within each paradox and master both ends of the spectrum."<sup>219</sup>

The first paradox (subordinate-leader) centers on how an associate pastor manages his or her relationships with their first chair leader(s).<sup>220</sup> In his follow-up book, *Thriving in the Second Chair: Ten Practices for Robust Ministry (When you're Not in Charge)*, Bonem turns, like so many other transformation writers, to Patrick Lencioni to affirm that trust in the most important ingredient in a working relationship.<sup>221</sup> Trust is built over time by an associate pastor through

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adapting the mainline pastoral ministry model to the Church Growth Movement. A more recent work, *When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007) by Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont, seeks to apply corporate resource tools in the congregational context. Most of the book focuses on such things as hiring practices, job descriptions, supervision, and performance evaluation with little to no attention given to transformation dynamics and how an associate pastor might uniquely contribute to the mission of the church.

217. Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 2.

218. Bonem and Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 4.

219. Bonem and Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 4.

220. In some cases, an associate pastor in a large church may actually serve as a "third" chair leader if the congregation has an Executive Pastor on staff.

221. See Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 188, referenced in Mike Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair: Ten Practices for Robust Ministry (When You're Not in Charge)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 10.

loyalty, excellent and consistent job performance and a willingness to admit mistakes.<sup>222</sup> Honest and open communication in the midst of all these dynamics will enable the first chair, second chair relationship(s) to thrive.

Part of an associate pastor's communication with senior leaders should be a formal request for permission to engage in any transformational experiment. By receiving consent, a pilot project will not be perceived by senior leadership as a subversive attempt to undermine the ministry of the church, neither will there be concerns when he or she begins to devote time to the effort. Ideally, leadership of the project should be included in the associate pastor's job description. If the associate pastor's congregation has a board and committee structure, it is imperative to seek their approval, as well, remembering that it is always best to describe the pilot project as an experiment with an intent to learn.

Throughout the experiment, Bolsinger says the associate pastor should treat senior leadership as partners in the transformational process:

Very often the leader in uncharted territory is not the authorized leader but someone tasked to explore the new terrain.... The key strategy for working with those above you in the system is, again, stay connected. Stay in relationship and close proximity with those above you.... It's best not to push superiors to take a stand (supporting a controversial change effort publically and early) but instead to pass the system anxiety and challenges on to them. Help your senior authorities feel the heat of urgency and anxiety that is creating the need for change. Don't shelter them from anxiety in the system, stay connected to them, even offering appropriate support as they work through *their* challenges. In this way you build healthy alliances with your superiors for them to stay with you in your challenges.<sup>223</sup>

Bonem's second paradox (deep-wide) focuses on the associate pastor's work habits. He believes that the most important skill an associate can bring to the congregation is the ability

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222. Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 14-15.

223. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 161-162.

think and act strategically.<sup>224</sup> One of the ways an associate pastor might manifest strategic thinking is by taking the results of a consultant's report and then combining it with the vision, mission and values of the church to design and lead a pilot project that enables the congregation to move forward into the future to which God is calling it. In this way, the associate pastor can focus on the future of the church while also serving the current ministry culture of the congregation. Since the first chair leadership of the congregation may be engulfed with maintaining the dominant ministry culture of the church, an associate pastor may be an ideal transformational figure for leading pilot experiments.

The third paradox (contentment-dreaming) relates to the associate pastor's emotions. Loneliness from seemingly having no one around who understands the difficult character of the tasks the second chair leader may be undertaking and frustration with the slow pace of change can cause an associate pastor (or any pastor for that matter) to slip into seasons of despondency. In the face of such certain emotional challenges, Bonem recommends that the associate pastor should discipline him or herself by grounding their identity in Christ.<sup>225</sup> Consistent Scripture meditation, prayer and devotional reading can serve to remind the leader that all of their hopes and aspirations for ministry should be formed around a faithful and secure obedience to their Lord rather than in and through a comparison game where the associate pastor begins to wonder whether they are “successful” enough in relation to their seminary classmates.<sup>226</sup>

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224. “Effective second chair leaders operate with a time horizon that is longer than today. They are making decisions based on the bigger picture. They are looking ahead, trying to prepare for the future and anticipating obstacles that could impede the organization’s progress” (Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 53).

225. See the chapter entitled, “Seek Lasting Rewards” in Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 111-123.

226. Bonem recommends Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008) as a remedy for the success-oriented leader (Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 119).

## Find a Sacajawea

Bonem makes passing reference to another strategy that an increasing number of leaders are turning toward in order to help them navigate the emotionally and technically bewildering context of post-Christendom ministry – that of employing a coach for help with ministry skills (including disciple making) as well as for emotional support.<sup>227</sup>

Bolsinger does not advocate specifically for a ministry coach in *Canoeing the Mountains*, but he does appeal for the pastor's need to find someone who can help him or her navigate the uncharted territory of mission and ministry in 21<sup>st</sup>-century North America – a “Sacajawea” who metaphorically has been through the mountains and can now come back and lead others through as well. Bolsinger believes that Western Church leaders should lay aside their pride and die to their self-reliance upon their current technical ministry prowess for ministry. In place of this hubris, pastors should don listening ears in order to learn from those in and outside the West who are already faithfully traversing the waters of post-Christendom ministry:

For many Christians throughout the world today, the death of Christendom in the West simply means there are more brothers and sisters joining them at the margins, more shared experience within the greater church, more equality of leadership roles. More valuing of previously ignored voices and more opportunities for shared witness to a world that is profoundly in need of the gospel. In other words, the deep disorientation for those trained in Christendom can be helped by learning to look to and partner with those who have already been living in post-Christendom marginality.<sup>228</sup>

Discipleship movements are growing exponentially around the world in places like China and India. Instead of treating Christian leaders who immigrate to the United States as objects of our mission, American pastors should seek their perspective for how to reach North American neighborhoods:

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227. Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 133.

228. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 193.

The vast experience of women, persons of color and leaders from majority world contexts is critical to the transitioning Western church as was Sacagawea's to Lewis and Clark. The problem, of course, is that even the reality of being trained for Christendom means that most of us won't recognize the value of a Sacagawea when she is sitting in front of us.... We tend to view our immigrant brothers and sisters as mission projects or as people who can cook exotic foods and dance and sing for their church programs, we rarely look to them as trainers for the church's future strength.<sup>229</sup>

Another set of voices to which Bolsinger makes no specific reference are Western Church leaders from non-North American contexts. For decades Christians in places like Australia, the British Isles and other parts of Western Europe have been experiencing an advanced form of secularism that has only now begun to manifest itself to the same degree in North America. Pastors in the United States would do well to read and absorb the wisdom of missional authors like Mike Breen, Alex Absalom, Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch and others who have been a part of ministries that have successfully engaged in mission in these non-North American and yet still Western contexts. Many of these leaders either personally coach church leaders themselves or they direct organizations that provide coaches.<sup>230</sup>

### **Summary: A Biblically Grounded and Contextually Appropriate Pastoral Leadership Model - Pastor as Equiper, Initiator and Steward of a Missional Discipleship Multiplication Movement**

This literature review has considered a number of authors who have written on the subject of missional church leadership and discipleship. Attention and analysis were given, as well, to the traditional Christendom approach to pastoral leadership so that pastors serving in historic Reformation churches can understand the context from which they are attempting to lead

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229. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 193.

230. Some of the currently available missional discipleship coaching organizations are: Mike Breen's 3DM ([www.3dmovements.com](http://www.3dmovements.com)); Alex Absalom's Dandelion Resourcing (<https://dandelionresourcing.com>); Alan Hirsch's 5Q (<https://5qcentral.com>), 100Movements ([www.100movements.com](http://www.100movements.com)), Forge Mission Training Network ([www.forgeamerica.com](http://www.forgeamerica.com)) and Future Travelers ([www.forgeamerica.com/training](http://www.forgeamerica.com/training)); Caesar Kalinowski's GCM Collective (<https://everydaydisciple.com/gcmcollective>), Missio Publishing (<https://missiopublishing.com>), Verge Network ([www.vergenetwork.org](http://www.vergenetwork.org)); and Bobby Harrington's Discipleship.org (<https://discipleship.org>).

transformation. Taking the threefold usage of the NT term *katartismos* (“equip”) to form an outline, this material is arranged in such a way that a pastor can become familiar with the key elements that are necessary to lead a historic church forward in its transformational journey.

The first section emphasized the need for the introduction of mid-sized sodalic forms into the life of the congregation as an intentional strategy for recovering biblical *oikos* and for demonstrating the Gospel in the communities which surround the church campus. Given that most historic churches from the mainline Reformation tradition have little to no history with sodalic forms of church life, the pastor will need to evaluate which particular model of these mid-sized communities best approximates the NT vision of incarnational community but does not stray too far afield from the “code” of the congregation. These mid-sized communities can become a transformational element in the life of a congregation and its city as individual participants learn in them to embody the missional discipleship DNA of Jesus (UP/IN/OUT). The result of this personal and corporate DNA integration will be a viral missional movement of self-replicating disciple making, missional community multiplication and church planting. Further, these mid-sized sodalities can serve as crucibles for leadership development and as bridges between unbelievers and their larger modalic mission sending center. Inclusion of these sodalities will result in a more fully orbed ecclesiology that reflects the foundational pattern of God’s intention for the Church as his Gospel-bearing instrument.

The second section focused on the writings of several authors who propose a range of approaches toward pastoral leadership. Over the last several decades there has been a recovery of a model of leadership based upon Ephesians 4:11-12 that centers the activity of the pastor around equipping the people he or she serves to pursue their own ministries. More recently, this model has been honed to include the pastor as a prime initiator and steward of a self-replicating

missional discipleship movement. Leading a movement of discipleship formation inevitably requires some degree of specialized training since most mainline pastors have not been prepared for such a task.<sup>231</sup> For reference, three particular training approaches for reclaiming NT patterns of disciple making have been included in this review. Once again, the pastor will need to choose which approach will best meet the needs of his or her ministry context.

The final section was formed around ten transformational elements a pastor should employ as he or she leads a missional discipleship movement to bring the congregation they serve into greater alignment with its own mission and strategy statements and with Christ's biblical vision for leadership in his Church. These ideas and strategies range from an awareness of the grief process associated with change to the competencies needed to lead transformation to the introduction or "transfusion" of an experimental intervention in the form of a sodality at the periphery of a congregation's leadership structure and life. Taken together, all of these elements may assist an associate pastor at a large, historic church to lead during this time when the Western Church so desperately needs pastors who can initiate and steward adaptive transformation in the lives of congregations.

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231. "Most churches do not multiply disciples or leaders because their philosophy of ministry and model of ministry do not require that they do so. Models of ministry that were developed during the protracted period of Christendom in the West increasingly defined pastoral roles and church function in ways that did not require the multiplication of disciples or the reproduction of leaders" (Sell, "Leadership in the Missional Church," 139).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROJECT

#### Overview

My research question focuses on whether an associate pastor at a large, historic church like FPC can equip its covenant partners in such a manner that will initiate a self-replicating discipleship movement and thereby address some of its ministry challenges, including its struggle to make missional disciples and to impact its surrounding neighborhoods with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This thesis-project has investigated this question by analyzing three significant theological shifts (chapter two) and by reviewing literature related to missional church leadership and disciple making (chapter three). In light of the research I have conducted thus far, it would appear that if an associate pastor introduces an incarnational sodality as an experimental pilot project at the organizational edges of the congregation, participants in the experiment will experience a degree of missional transformation that will inspire and prepare them to share this same missional disciple-making experience with others and to invite them into community.

The chapter will begin by detailing the research process that led me toward the design of this pilot project. Here, I will include the journey that took me to the particular disciple-making strategy I chose and the very important process of identifying our “Sacajawea” – a coach who could possibly lead us through the uncharted territory in which I and some of our other staff leaders were entering.

After explaining my research process, I will describe the design of my project. Included in this section will be a detailing of the parameters of my two-phased experiment and my

reasoning for the testing instruments I chose to assist me in assessing the success or failure of the project in relation to the question raised in my hypothesis.

Before executing the project, I secured permission for the experiment from several of my senior staff supervisors, pastoral colleagues and committee chairs to which I, as an associate pastor, am accountable. My intent in speaking with these various supervisors and lay leaders was also to establish lines of communication with them so that they could remain abreast of my activities and the progress of the experiment. The climax of the preparation season of the project was to carefully select the high-capacity innovators from the congregation who would be participants with me in the launch of the project.

After chronicling the execution of both phases of this experiment, I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of the data I received from the two feedback instruments to which I and the other participants responded. Of special interest to me will be how and in what ways the participants and I experienced a marked increase in the quality of our own discipleship, including our skill for discipling others, and in our ability to lead others effectively in incarnational community.

## **Research**

### **Choose Training Strategy**

The genesis of this project began some fourteen years ago when, as a church planter, I began to feel some discontented wonderment about the way I was “doing church.” This discontentment morphed into despondency as I read Reggie McNeal’s “six tough questions for the church.”<sup>1</sup> It was more than this attractionally oriented, supremely burned-out pastor could

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1. Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

hear. McNeal convinced me that the conventional model of church planting I was following in the mid-2000s was perfectly appropriate for the 1950s. His hard questioning propelled me on a quest to find a better way for doing mission and ministry in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century North American context.

In 2011, two years after I came to FPC, one of my colleagues sent an email “White Paper” to the other pastors on the staff detailing the failure of our Sunday School program to create community among the church’s covenant partners. As an alternative, he proposed the idea of forming geographically-based “community groups” which might serve to augment our Sunday School-based discipleship efforts and provide opportunities for new people who are visiting and joining the church to be welcomed and nurtured. The staff did not follow up on his email.

In 2014, FPC’s *TAG Discovery Report* detailed a variety of strengths and weaknesses in FPC’s mission and ministry. The leadership of the congregation then entered into a strategic planning season in which the church was left to brainstorm solutions to address the challenges the report raised. Participation in the final implementation phase of our strategic visioning process drove me to begin to consider how we, as a congregation, and I in particular, might respond to some of the questions the TAG report left unanswered.

When I attended the Exponential East Conference for the first time in the spring of 2015, I experienced a “kairos” moment when I heard a Chinese Church leader named Ying Kai make passing reference to the 2.2 million Chinese that had been baptized using his discipleship replication method called “Training 4 Trainers.”<sup>2</sup> His comments were mind boggling to me as a North American Church leader. Nothing close to this kind of movement has been seen in the United States for well over one hundred and fifty years.

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2. Steve Smith with Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources), 2011. For a review of information related to the Exponential Conferences, see chapter one, page 9, footnote 21.

My experience at the Exponential Conference convinced me that there were indeed biblically faithful and contextually sound methodologies for “doing church” in the West, and though the conference’s main focus was on equipping church planters, many of the ideas that were discussed appeared to be applicable to the life of an existing, historic congregation. Although I had been exposed to the theories of missional church authors for years, these conferences offered an opportunity to explore in detail the similar, yet different, models of apostolic leadership and disciple making these speakers and workshop leaders were proposing. I became convinced that somewhere within these various models was a ministry approach that could propel FPC forward into the transformational journey it needed to take.

I was particularly intrigued by Alex Absalom, an Englishman who had moved to the United States in order to develop his church consulting firm.<sup>3</sup> I attended a seminar he led that was based on one of his books that described the five social contexts in which Jesus developed his disciples.<sup>4</sup> Absalom’s presentation led me to consider how FPC might organize its discipleship ministry to reflect the comprehensive strategy Jesus used to disciple his followers.

Interested in reading more of Absalom’s work, I found an additional book entitled *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* that he had co-authored with another Englishman, Mike Breen.<sup>5</sup> *Launching Missional Communities* was the first practical resource I had read which offered a detailed method of how to launch and lead missional communities and train self-replicating disciples. I soon discovered that Breen had written a wide array of other

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3. Information about Absalom’s church consulting firm can be found at: <http://dandelionresourcing.com>.

4. Alex Absalom and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

5. Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2015).

books on missional discipleship that were available at the publishing house and consulting group he had founded: 3 Dimension Movements (hereafter “3DM”).

Breen’s primary text for learning the 3DM missional discipleship process is *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did.*<sup>6</sup> The first few lines of the book appeared to speak directly to a question I had been asking for years: How can a mainline heritage congregation like FPC design ministry to make disciples in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context? Breen’s solution to this question is to introduce elements into the life of a church that will catalyze a transformation in its ministry culture.<sup>7</sup> The first element is a discipleship “vehicle” that approximates Jesus’ rabbi-disciple method for training his twelve disciples. Breen calls this “Huddle.” The second element is a social context for this disciple-making process that recovers biblical *oikos*. Breen calls this “Missional Community” or “family on mission.” The third element is a consistent missional discipleship language he forms around his “LifeShapes.”

When I first read Breen’s analysis in *Building a Discipling Culture* of the Western Church’s pastoral leadership approach with its consumeristic entrapment and apparent inability to replicate disciples, I was struck by how accurately he seemed to describe FPC’s situation as well as my own:

The problem is that most of us have been educated and trained to build, serve and lead the organization of the church. Most of us have actually never been trained to make disciples. Seminary degrees, church classes and training seminars teach us to grow our volunteer base, form systems and organizational structures or preach sermons on Sunday mornings and assimilate newcomers from the Sunday service. As we look around as Christendom is crumbling and the landscape of the church is forever changed, a stark

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6. Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016).

7. I detail these three elements in chapter three under the heading “Breen’s Huddle and Missional Community Strategy.”

revelation emerges: Most of us have been trained and educated for a world that no longer exists.<sup>8</sup>

Those words spoke forthrightly to my own training and struggles as a leader, and Breen's searing assessment of the Western Church's approach to disciple making became personally and professionally convicting:

Most of us have become quite good at the church thing. And yet, disciples are the only thing that Jesus cares about, and it's the only number that Jesus is counting. Not our attendance or budget or buildings.... [Do the lives of those who attend our churches] look like the lives of the people we see in Scripture? Are we just good at getting people together once a week and maybe into a small group, or are we actually good at producing the types of people we read about in the New Testament? Have we shifted our criteria for a good disciple as someone who shows up to our stuff, gives money and occasionally feeds poor people?<sup>9</sup>

The *coup de gras* for me was this: "If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples."<sup>10</sup> That sentence struck my mind like a lightning bolt. At last, I believed I had found a simple statement about ministry design that appeared to explain why Western churches were having so much difficulty with making disciples and connecting to their communities.

I also became convinced that I was not a skillful disciple maker. I had been trained in the traditional Reformation and Church Growth model of ministry that contends that the overwhelmingly key element of a successful congregation is an excellently skilled pastor who is adept at leading it by preaching, teaching, offering pastoral care and administrating the programs of the church. However, it was becoming increasingly clear to me that this approach to pastoral leadership was neither biblically faithful nor missionally effective. The facts were aligning. Not

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8. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 4.

9. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 5.

10. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 5.

only was FPC's ministry philosophy in need of change, but in order to move FPC forward in its transformation I would need to change as well.

Breen's straightforward assessment of the traditional clergy-centric approach to ministry seemed to correlate with the ministry weaknesses highlighted in FPC's TAG Report.<sup>11</sup> Breen comments, "If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide."<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Breen's corrective to the "missional church" movement for its apparent willingness to speak about the missional impulse of the church without a concomitant discussion of discipleship brought clarity to some of the questions I had as an associate pastor for evangelism concerning the relationship between discipleship and mission. Breen believes that the Church's call to evangelism is most properly understood as a part of the disciple-making task that Jesus delivered in his Great Commission.<sup>13</sup> He states,

Granted, we should focus on people who don't know Jesus yet, but Jesus himself gave us the model for doing that: Disciple people. If you know how to actually make disciples, you'll reach people who don't know Jesus. Because that's simply what disciples do. That was Jesus' whole plan. If you disciple people, as these people do mission in their everyday comings and goings, with the work and shaping of the Spirit, the future of the church will emerge. It all starts with making disciples.... Our only job and the last

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11. "There is a subtle and destructive process at work in a consumer-oriented church (even if what is being consumed is spiritual). Without knowing it the church that operates as a provider of spiritual products sets in motion an endless cycle of production that, in the end, cannot be sustained" (*TAG Discovery Report to First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC, May 2014*, 20). "The fear of losing membership triggers the hiring of more staff to keep programs and services at an acceptable level. And an increasingly post-Christian culture is less likely to replace those consumers with others who share a common interest in 'church.' And the cycle continues (*Discovery Report*, 21). "Staff members should generally be hired to support and equip members in their ministry. It seems most members prefer hiring staff to do the ministry. But the staff also plays a role in this system. They don't want to make people unhappy. After all, this is their livelihood. So the whole consumer-driven system is designed to resist change" (*Discovery Report*, 21).

12. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 5.

13. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 18:19-20).

instructions he gave us, was to make disciples. And out of this we will get the church. Out of this, the future will emerge, and out of this, there will be a missional wave the likes of which we have never seen.<sup>14</sup>

Breen's criticism of the Western Church's approach to ministry felt perceptive, but I wondered whether he could offer any positive and practical solutions to the dilemmas confronting Christian leaders of historic congregations here in the United States. Specifically, would he be like so many other missional authors who over the years have called the Western Church to recover its ability to make disciples but then offer no practical method for doing so? Additionally, I was unsure if his model for missional disciple making could be transfused into the DNA of a congregation that was so steeped in a mainline Reformation ministry tradition. Would the new DNA take hold in the culture of the church and then multiply, or would the host reject the transfusion because of the radically foreign nature of the new DNA? Further, was there a specific strategy I could use as an associate pastor to introduce this new DNA into the life of the church I serve in a way that might lessen the possibility of a negative reaction? It all sounded like a great idea for an experiment.

However, before pursuing Breen's strategy for introducing culture change via his three transformational elements for disciple making and church leadership renewal, I felt that I should investigate other potential models for congregational transformation as well. This led me to consider a number of missional authors in search of some method for initiating a missional discipleship movement which could be interpreted and easily applied in FPC's particular context. All of them, for various reasons, seemed to fall short of the approach that Breen appeared to offer.

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14. Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 6.

For example, the format of Hugh Halter and Matt Smay's *The Tangible Kingdom Primer* seemed just too postmodern for FPC sensibilities.<sup>15</sup> The random fonts and graphics and the lack of background information for the edgy missional exercises they recommend did not appear to be a fit. In contrast, Breen's material was easy to read and straightforward in its presentation.<sup>16</sup>

Neil Cole's independent house church model was too far astray from FPC's central campus ministry philosophy which is typified by its cathedral-esque worship. Cole's house church DNA would have been rejected by the FPC host, but Breen's intriguing appeal to the cathedral-parish model of the Middle Ages looked to hold some promise for adaption at FPC.

Unlike Cole who makes no space for a modalic church form, Breen's European model appears to seek a healthier and more proportionate balance between the church "Gathered and Scattered" for missiological effectiveness. Any attempt to introduce a ministry strategy at FPC that does not include some place for sodality would most certainly be a foolhardy endeavor. The "European" model with a missional sending center (modality) in the middle with an MC satellite system around it (sodalities) looked much more consistent with FPC's established DNA.

Cole's Life Transformation Group disciple-making strategy seemed too small of a start-off point. I was convinced that I had an abundance of high-capacity leaders in the congregation who were eager to begin an immediate transformational experience. I could not foresee working with only two of these leaders for a year before multiplying the group. Faced with the need for a model that could multiply much more rapidly throughout a large congregation, Breen's approach seemed to offer much more appeal.

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15. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom Primer: An Eight-Week Guide to Incarnational Community*, 2nd ed. (Anaheim, CA: Church Resource Ministries, 2009).

16. At the time, I did not realize that Halter and Smay had written a more thorough introduction to their method a year before the release of their *Primer*. See Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Greg Ogden's *Discipleship Essentials* appeared to resemble the old fill-in-the-blank, small group or classroom curricula of the past.<sup>17</sup> His three-person micro group strategy displayed the same drawbacks as Cole's method, and his overall approach did not feature a missional community dimension. Given that so many missional authors are extoling incarnational communities as an important strategy to reach the West, I felt like this was a glaring omission.

J. R. Woodward's robust advocacy for a "polycentric leadership" based on APEST would have been too alien an idea for a historic congregation like FPC to embrace without first working through many other issues related to discipleship and mission.<sup>18</sup> Breen's material features an APEST dynamic as well, but this subject matter is introduced near the end of his disciple-making method and in a much less startling fashion.

Jeff Vanderstelt's loosely connected missional community model did not seem to comport with FPC's engrained reliance upon a centralized ministry structure.<sup>19</sup> And Brian Sanders' approach at Tampa Underground appears to be much more focused on making missionaries than disciples.<sup>20</sup> Everts, Schaupp and Gordon's excellent small book *Breaking the Huddle* contains many outstanding ideas, but it is not enough of a comprehensive resource to

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17. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

18. See J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

19. See Jeff Vanderstelt's, *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), and *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

20. Brian Sanders, *Underground Church: A Living Example of the Church in its Most Potent Form* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

propel the culture change needed at FPC.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Breen's 3DM organization has produced a great deal of training and consulting resources.

### Identify a Coach

While looking at a number of these missional church authors, organizations and models, I also considered who might provide us with a "Sacajawea" – an experienced coach who could guide us through the transformational process of building a missional discipleship culture at FPC. In this regard, I contacted Alex Absalom, but he had recently moved to California and that seemed to preclude easy availability for on-site interaction. Alan Hirsch's literature and ministry philosophy can come across in an abstruse manner, and the various coaching cohorts he offers appear to be designed for congregations and leaders who were much more poised for dramatic transformation than FPC.<sup>22</sup> At the time when I did my survey of coaching resources, Caesar Kalinowski's and the Verge Network's internet-based coaching systems did not appear to offer much appeal either.<sup>23</sup> A quick survey among FPC's leaders revealed that they were deeply desirous of at least some occasional, personal contact with their coach.

Here, again, Breen seemed to offer to FPC what others could not provide. The 3DM organization makes coaches and immersive "Learning Communities" available for congregations seeking to explore Breen's method. For maximum effectiveness in implementing their strategy, 3DM's material in fact urges local church leaders not to initiate the process of missional

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21. Donald Everts, Douglas Schaupp, and Valerie Gordon, *Breaking the Huddle: How Your Community Can Grow its Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

22. I attended one of Hirsch's 100M events in Snellville, GA ([www.100movements.com](http://www.100movements.com)). These gatherings, which also featured Neil Cole, were designed to identify one hundred congregations in North America who are "movement ready." The twelve-question survey they distributed indicated that FPC is not movement ready. As such, it was not eligible for 100M's coaching.

23. See [www.caesarkalinowski.com](http://www.caesarkalinowski.com) and [www.vergenetwork.org](http://www.vergenetwork.org), respectively.

discipleship culture change alone but to engage the services of a 3DM trained consultant.<sup>24</sup> In July 2016, I began making inquiries through another associate pastor in my denomination to find a 3DM coach.<sup>25</sup> Later that month, I had identified a former 3DM consultant who then pastored a United Methodist church plant in Fayetteville, North Carolina, which was only a three-hour drive away from FPC. He agreed to enter into a two-year coaching relationship which would involve weekly, one-hour, online coaching calls with a group of ministry leaders at FPC I would help to gather, a “strategy call” with me every other week, and a twice per-year on-site visit for further consulting.<sup>26</sup>

## Design

### Establish Parameters for the Project

With our consultant, I designed an overall missional discipleship culture-change strategy plan for FPC in which he would begin in August 2016 by coaching an elder, a youth director, and five of the associate pastors on staff, including myself, in Breen’s missional disciple-making approach.<sup>27</sup> I called this group our “Staff Huddle” even though it did include one elder. The next step in our plan called for the members of the Staff Huddle to begin a few months later with leading our own Huddles made up of high-capacity lay leaders at FPC in the same manner we had been taught by our consultant.

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24. To review Breen’s recommendations related to introducing his process into an existing congregation, see chapter three, page 132, footnote 133.

25. Initial contacts with 3DM came when I spoke with a friend who serves as an associate pastor at a sister church in our denomination: First Presbyterian Church, Florence, SC. That congregation had already begun a consultation process with a former 3DM coach. That individual led us to another former 3DM associate who served as our coach during the process of this experiment.

26. See Appendix D “Project Timeline” for a calendar of our coaching sessions and on-site visits.

27. For a review of Breen’s method, see chapter three, “Breen’s Huddle and Missional Community Strategy.”

Phase I of this thesis experiment would commence whenever I began to form my own Huddles for missional disciple making and then conclude when I started training my Huddle participants to lead Missional Communities.<sup>28</sup> My plan for Phase II of the experiment included three parts. First, while on hiatus from Huddle discipleship training, I would equip my Huddle participants to launch and lead their own Missional Communities. Second, I would resume their Huddle training while they still led their MCs. Third, I would launch and lead my own MC as part of a team that I had equipped.

### Determine Testing Materials

In order to quantify the results of this study, I needed some way for the Huddle participants and myself to assess if and how our ability to disciple others had changed.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the TAG Transforming Church Index FPC used during its strategic planning season included very little opportunity for survey respondents to offer feedback in relation to missional discipleship. Instead, most of the questions focused on how they perceived the quality of the mission and ministry the church offered.

Providentially, the leadership of the denomination of which I am a part finished their beta testing of a new online, self-completion discipleship measuring tool they call the “Discipleship 360 Assessment.”<sup>30</sup> The overall intent of this survey is to measure a respondent’s discipleship in

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28. During both of the execution phases of this thesis-project, our consultant continued with the once-per-week coaching sessions with the Staff Huddle and the bi-weekly strategy calls with me.

29. Because I strategically selected participants for this experiment who are committed, high-capacity leaders at FPC rather than randomly assigning covenant partners from the congregation, this study should be technically described as a “quasi-experiment” rather than a true experiment.

30. The Discipleship 360 Assessment is offered by Flourish Movements, the discipleship resource ministry of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). This assessment is a “tool that measures the relative health of a disciple in eight core qualities and twenty-one associated characteristics. It is recommended that anyone who takes the survey will have been a Christian for the minimum of one year. The assessment consists of seventy

terms of eight core qualities and twenty characteristics.<sup>31</sup> In light of my project's specific focus on equipping disciples to equip others, one of the qualifications termed "Engaging Others Toward Discipleship" gave this assessment a special appeal to me. Because of the specific questions related to this area of disciple making, I believed that this testing instrument could offer me a usable picture of how high-capacity leaders at FPC viewed their own skills and identities as disciplers. As a result, I decided that all of the pilot project participants and myself would take the assessment both before and after the conclusion of the study to see if and how our skills, perceptions and activities as disciplers could have changed.<sup>32</sup>

In order to collect additional data concerning the effect of this pilot project, I also chose to offer participants an opportunity to respond to two open-ended questions at the conclusion of the study: "What is the most important thing you will take away from your experience in Huddle and your participation/leadership in MC?" and "Knowing what you know now, how could that experience have been improved?"<sup>33</sup> By using the scores from the online assessment and the written answers from these two essay questions, I believed this would give me enough

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items in which disciples are asked whether they strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, or strongly agree. An example statement is: 'The individual sacrificially serves others with his or her time.' In order to complete the '360' aspect of the assessment, participants in the survey are encouraged to invite four to eight other people to take the assessment on their behalf. Space is provided at the end of the survey for written comments. After the assessment is complete, a report is generated. The report shows a comparison between how the disciple assessed him/herself and the average of how their 360 observers assessed the individual" ("Discipleship 360 Assessment," Flourish: Fueling a Movement, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.flourishmovement.org/assessments/discipleship-360-assessment](http://www.flourishmovement.org/assessments/discipleship-360-assessment)).

31. Using a five-point Likert response scale, this instrument measures one's responses to a series of seventy questions. Responses are correlated with eight Core Discipleship Qualities (Gospel Saturated Life; Connected to God; Exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit; Understanding the Bible story and the Bible's impact on life; Understanding Incarnational Posture; Engaging Others Toward Discipleship; Community; and Fulfills God's Call on Their Lives). Responses are then further correlated with twenty particular Discipleship Characteristics that fall within the Core Qualities. For a sample Discipleship 360 Assessment report, see <https://www.flourishmovement.org/static/media/uploads/assessments/mary-sample-discipleship-360-assessment.pdf>.

32. Statisticians call the type of testing a "one-group, pre and post-test design."

33. The addition of these post-test qualitative questions creates a "mixed design" study, one that is comprised of both quantitative and qualitative data.

information to determine whether a measurable change had occurred in our beliefs and behaviors as missional disciple makers.

## Organizational Preparation

### Secure Permission for the Experiment and Establish Accountable Lines of Communication

Though my plan was to initiate the experiment without fanfare and apart from the normal ministry program of the church, I still needed to secure official permission for the pilot project so that my supervising senior staff, staff colleagues and the governing bodies of the congregation could remain abreast of my work.<sup>34</sup> So, before I asked anyone to participate in one of my Huddle groups, beginning in early June 2016, I first spoke with the senior pastor, the executive pastor, and another associate pastor on staff who was responsible for resourcing our diaconate.<sup>35</sup> I gained their support and permission to engage a select group of leaders in a “discipleship experiment.”<sup>36</sup> In all of my interactions with them, I alluded to Acts 5:38b-39 as a way of

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34. By design I made no pulpit, bulletin, or newsletter announcements about the pilot project. Instead, I used 3DM’s “Person of Peace” strategy and invited into the pilot experiment only those I believed were high-capacity individuals who would respond to my invitation and my leadership. Former 3DM consultant Eric Pfeiffer says, “No matter how tempting it can be, we don’t recommend letting people sign up for your MC as a response to a Sunday morning service/sermon. This is how you start programs, not grow families” (Eric Pfeiffer, *Missional Communities Leadership Guide: Starting Growing, and Multiplying Your Missional Groups* [Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016], 59). Neil Cole urges that a “skunk works project” should not only be outside the usual program of the church but that it should start in a place other than the church campus (Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically from the Inside Out* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012], 144). The reader should be aware that many times traditional Presbyterian polity in large churches requires a dizzying array of approvals from different staff persons and various governing bodies before a new ministry initiative may begin. For a timeline of meetings to secure approval of the process, see Appendix D.

35. “The key strategy for working with those above you in the system is, again, stay connected. Stay in relationship and close proximity with those above you” (Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015], 161).

36. “In short, when intervening in the system, there needs to be a clear sense that *learning* is the goal, that we are not making any big, permanent changes but simply trying out some ideas to see what we might find” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121). “Framing everything as an experiment offers you more running room to try new strategies, to ask questions, to discover what’s expendable, and what innovation can work. In addition, an experimental frame creates permission and therefore some protection when you fail” (Ronald Heifetz, Alexander

offering assurance that the project would not be forced upon leaders and congregants who did not want to participate.<sup>37</sup>

Following consultation with FPC’s senior staff, I then asked the chair and vice-chair of the diaconate for permission to invite some of our deacons under their charge to participate in my pilot project. Knowing that involvement in the Huddle process would necessitate a reduction of time in some of their other responsibilities, I asked that any deacons who might work with me be relieved from some of their normal duties. With their agreement, I then turned to several sessional committees for their approval.

I first approached the Adult Education Committee to approve funding for a 3DM consultant to coach some of our staff in their method of disciple making. Following that committee’s approval, I approached the Missional Ministry and Evangelism Committee with the idea of working with a select group of deacons in a missional discipleship initiative. Once that committee approved the pilot project, the chair of that committee presented a report to the session that included “six action items” related to the Strategic Visioning Plan to be pursued in 2016-2017. One of the action items was vaguely termed “Missional Living Classes.” The committee chair communicated that these “classes” were to be led by me and that they would involve some of the deacons. The session received the report as information on July 25, 2016.

### Select Participants

With these multiple levels of consultation and permission from senior staff, the session and the leadership of our diaconate, I was ready to turn to the careful task of identifying those

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Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* [Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009], 277).

37. “For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38b-39).

who might join me as participants in this missional disciple-making experiment. Breen's material notes that Jesus chose only a few to enter into an intentional discipleship relationship with him.<sup>38</sup>

When believers are chosen as participants in 3DM's discipling process, it is made clear to them that the Huddle leader expects a "return" on the investment he or she will make in them. That return comes when these Huddle participants form their own Huddles of six to eight people in the future and then those new disciples disciple others as well.<sup>39</sup>

3DM makes it clear that Huddle leaders are in fact "leaders" and not merely group facilitators in the traditional small group sense.<sup>40</sup> In order to add clout and gravitas to this discipleship initiative, I began to consider approaching some of the ordained lay leadership at FPC to become participants in this project. At FPC there are two groups of recognized and ordained lay leaders: the elders who form the session, and the deacons who form the diaconate.

The most natural source of leadership to approach at FPC for participation in the project would seemingly have been the elders. In the spring of 2016, an ad hoc "Governance Committee" was chosen by the session to study some of the recommendations the TAG report had made in terms of reconsidering the role of elder leadership in the congregation. At the time,

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38. "Put simply, we invite only a few people into a discipling relationship with us. If Jesus invited twelve people, we're going to assume right off the bat we can't do as many as he did. And we invite these people into a HUDDLE" (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54). See Mark 3:14.

39. "Huddles do not grow by adding new members; Huddles grow when members of your Huddle start their own. Why do it this way? Because we take seriously the principle that Jesus established: Every disciple disciplines. You can't be a disciple if you aren't willing to invest in and disciple others. That's simply called the Great Commission" (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 55).

40. "Small groups are usually led by facilitators who are looking to create space for everyone to share and contribute.... Huddle focuses 100% on leaders. It's got to be leaders. If you Huddle a leader and disciple them, invest in them, give them an easily transferrable and portable discipling language, teach them how to disciple others, teach them how to calibrate Invitation and Challenge in discipling both individuals and groups...*they can do this in any sort of spiritual formation vehicle*" ("The difference between Huddles and Small Groups...and why many churches use both," Mike Breen blog, March 19, 2012, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/the-difference-between-huddles-and-small-groups-and-why-many-people-use-both/>). 3DM Huddles are led by leaders and their purpose is to train new discipling leaders. In contrast, small groups tend to focus on group care and are content driven.

when I was still pondering who my first Huddle participants might be, the committee had not made any concrete recommendations, though the general sense was that elders should function more as “shepherds” within the life of the church rather than as essentially middle managers in the church bureaucracy. In my mind, a biblical synonym for shepherd is “discipler,” and so I thought that our elders would be the most natural candidates for this experiment. However, at that time the session was still committed to the “elders as middle managers” model, so as a whole, this group did not appear to be a fertile ground for participants, especially since they continued to maintain so many of their institutional responsibilities.

It seemed to me that FPC’s deacons offered much more promise for the experiment in terms of availability and flexibility within their current duties, and as ordained officers in the church they brought with them a mantle of servant leadership that was recognized by the congregation even though their role lacked the more seriously perceived governance function of the elders.<sup>41</sup> Since Bolsinger advises not to start a transformational intervention at the center of a church’s governance structure and Cole explicitly advises against starting with a church’s elders, I determined that the diaconate was a much more appropriate location to find participants if I intended to include officers in the experiment.<sup>42</sup>

On July 26, 2016 I returned to the leadership of the diaconate with a list of potential deacons I perceived as high-capacity “early adopters” in the congregation. I believed that these candidates would also respond to my invitation and leadership and would be willing to reproduce what they had learned from me in others. The diaconal leadership gave me a few additional

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41. The FPC *Diaconate Manual* details the duties of deacons. Most of their duties entail ushering, visiting the hospital on a rotating basis, attending meetings of the diaconate, and serving as liaisons between the diaconate and the sessional committees they have been assigned. Other duties include writing “thank you” cards and delivering flowers to home-bound members.

42. See Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121, and Cole and Helper, *Church Transfusion*, 150.

names to consider, and I included them with the others I had identified. All of these potential participants plus some high-capacity non-ordained covenant partners I had contacted in the congregation were invited to an informational meeting on August 2.

At the meeting, I presented the group with a proposed schedule for the fall that included time off for holidays, a vision for why this initiative could be so important in the life of our church and a series of articles for further reading that outlined the differences between Missional Communities and some of the other forms of social ministry gatherings with which they might be familiar (e.g., small groups, Bible studies, and community groups).<sup>43</sup> I also conveyed the nature of what would be my investment in them and what I expected in return which was a willingness to replicate what I, as Huddle leader, would teach and model for them in the lives of others they themselves would choose to train in the future.

I advised them that at points during the process I would spend some personal time with them also. This would include individual lunches with the men and group lunches with the women. More than anything I sought to inspire those who attended these informational meetings with a sense that they could potentially be a part of a vanguard who could profoundly change the ministry culture of FPC.<sup>44</sup> I also painted a picture of what their own discipleship growth might look like and how their lives could be transformed by their participation in God's mission to our community.

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43. The two articles I shared at the introductory meeting that describe the differences between Huddles and Missional Communities and some of the other forms of home group gathering with which the participants may have been familiar are: Breen, "The Difference between Huddles and Small Groups," and Todd Engstrom, "What Makes a Missional Community Different?" The Gospel Coalition, June 5, 2013, accessed July 23, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-makes-a-missional-community-different/>. Engstrom serves as the executive pastor of campuses and communities at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX.

44. "Inspiration is the capacity to move people by reaching in and filling their hearts from deeper sources of meaning. To lead your organization through adaptive change you need the ability to inspire. Adaptive challenges involve values, not simply facts or logic. And resolving them engages people's beliefs and loyalties, which lie in their hearts, not their heads" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 263).

Of the fourteen deacons I approached in this informational meeting, eight responded positively. Knowing beforehand that I would probably not have all the deacons I would need to fully populate the experiment, I invited some other leaders I knew in the congregation to come to this meeting also. Many of these young leaders had been involved in a “community group” initiative I had helped to launch several years before. However, that experience had grown stale, and they were looking for a fresh expression of community life. All six of these (non-deacon) leaders who attended the informational meeting responded positively. This made the total number of participants fourteen.

Knowing that the maximum number of Huddle participants 3DM recommends is ten, I set about dividing these respondents into two groups. Nine of them would meet with me on Wednesday nights from 6:15-7:30 pm starting on October 5 in the church staff conference room as a part of the congregation’s Wednesday Advantage series. By meeting at this time, this group would enjoy the benefit of the church’s childcare for their children. The other group of five met at 10:15-11:30 am on Thursdays, starting October 6 in our Women’s Ministry Parlor. That group was able to take advantage of the church’s Mother’s Morning Out program.

While leading these Huddles that fall, I also made a number of general presentations on Huddles, LifeShapes, and Missional Communities and the concepts behind them to our Senior Staff Leadership Team and several Adult Sunday School classes. I did this in order to begin to re-shape some of the theological foundations of the congregation, to warm the culture of the church toward this new approach to ministry, to introduce 3DM language to a wider group of listeners and to maintain channels of communication between myself and my colleagues and

supervisors.<sup>45</sup> As always, I presented these ideas in a playful tone, describing the pilot project as an experiment and a learning opportunity.

## **Execution**

### Phase I: Begin Training Huddle Participants

Phase I of the experiment started in October 2016 when I began to disciple the members of my two pilot Huddles in the manner that I had learned from our consultant.<sup>46</sup> The group that met on Wednesday evenings commenced October 5 and the Thursday morning group started on October 6. Each meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes. Of the Wednesday group, eight were men and one was a woman. Five of the men were ordained deacons. The Thursday Huddle included one man and four women. He and two of the women were deacons.

During the course of Phase I, I followed 3DM's "coaching spreadsheet" which details the format of each meeting and how to use Breen's *Building a Discipling Culture* as the basic text for our discussion. Participants were frequently asked to read a chapter of the book as homework between meetings and then to return next week and reflect upon something that struck them as important from their reading. My main task as Huddle Leader was to help the group members process their "kairos" moments around Breen's Learning Circle and to train them to take over more and more leadership of the group as the experience progressed. I usually processed each LifeShape with the groups over a three-week period. The first week focused on the content of the LifeShape and the Scriptural principles behind it. The second week involved a personal application of the LifeShape and the third week would include a leadership application.

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45. "Language creates culture" (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 57-58).

46. Appendix D contains a timeline for Phase I that includes the training topics for each meeting. Two of the other associate pastors in our Staff Huddle started their Huddles a few months later.

While my Huddle groups were in the first phase of their training, I offered a number of presentations about MC and Huddle in various staff meetings and Sunday School classes. Many of my hearers strained to understand this new way of approaching mission and ministry. After hearing one of my presentations, a retired engineer and elder in an older adult Sunday School class exclaimed with excitement that I should immediately put everyone's name in the class on a spreadsheet and then assign them to MCs. Like so many others in the congregation this leader struggled to understand the non-classroom, relational dynamics surrounding Breen's model for missional disciple making. At each presentation, I made it clear that this was only an experiment some of us at FPC were involved in and that no one was being asked to change anything they were currently doing.

Through both Phase I and Phase II of this experiment, our coach continued to meet with me and the rest of the members of the Staff Huddle via a weekly internet call. He and I also spoke together privately for our regular "strategy calls."<sup>47</sup> In the late fall of 2016, he traveled to FPC for an on-site training event that included members of the Staff Huddle and all those whom we were leading in Huddles.

#### Phase II: Begin Training MC Leaders, Launch MCs and Resume Huddle

##### **May 2017**

Phase II of the experiment began in May 2017 when I temporarily interrupted the Huddle process to begin a four-week training series with my two Huddle groups on how to lead a Missional Community.<sup>48</sup> In their literature, 3DM states that anyone who desires to lead an MC

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47. See Appendix D for a calendar of these Staff Huddle meetings and private Strategy calls.

48. Appendix D includes a calendar and list of topics related to the MC leader training.

must have first been Huddled and mentored in 3DM's MC leadership method.<sup>49</sup> As a part of that training, I required participants to read selected chapters from Breen's *Family on Mission* as homework and then to reflect with me on that reading each week when we met together.<sup>50</sup> I also recommended reading from Eric Pfeiffer's *Missional Communities Leader Guide*.<sup>51</sup> Pfeiffer's book contains a wealth of practical guidance for leading MCs, and it includes forty-eight suggested meeting outlines including prayer and "family devotion" ideas.<sup>52</sup>

### **June 2017-August 2017**

At the conclusion of their training in May, these potential MC leaders were then asked to meet at least twice per month over the summer in homes and to experiment with various missional activities or "OUTs" in their neighborhoods.<sup>53</sup> In addition to including their nuclear family members, MC leaders were given an opportunity to recruit from the church's new member classes and to invite their friends from around the church as well. Two MCs were formed by my Huddle participants that summer.

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49. "[MC] multiplication will never go faster than leadership development. You will never multiply your MC faster than you raise up new leaders who can do what you do. This is why identifying potential leaders and starting a Huddle within your MC early in the process is important. Huddle is the vehicle that trains new leaders within an MC, and the MC is, of course, simply the extended family on mission together that provides the context for training those in Huddle. This is how MCs and Huddles 'fit together' in the larger paradigm of discipleship and mission (Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* [Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 201s], 75).

50. Mike Breen and Sally Breen, *Family on Mission: Integrating Discipleship into the Fabric of our Lives*, 2nd ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries), 2018.

51. Eric Pfeiffer, *Missional Communities Leader Guide: Starting Growing, and Multiplying Your Missional Groups* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016).

52. "Family Devotions" are that part of each MC gathering. Here, participants respond to a short teaching given by one of the MC leaders. The starter ideas that Pfeiffer offers are based upon Huddle principles and topics.

53. "OUT" is the 3DM language for missional activity engaged in by MCs. The term is derived from the "UP/IN/OUT Relationship Triangle" LifeShape.

Near the conclusion of summer, I asked these MC leaders whether they would like to continue leading and gathering as incarnational communities. All of them responded with a resounding “Yes!”

## **September 2017-March 2018**

Through the fall of 2017 and into early 2018, the church’s two MCs multiplied to create two more, giving FPC a total of four incarnational communities. Starting in September, my Huddle participants returned after the summer break to complete their Huddle training. That training concluded in November 2017.<sup>54</sup>

Because of my work and that of some of my colleagues in the Staff Huddle, by the winter of 2017-2018 over sixty persons at FPC either had been or were in the process of being Huddled. Fifty-four had also received the four weeks of 3DM instruction on how to lead missional communities and many of them were poised to start their own MCs in the near future.<sup>55</sup>

Midway through Phase II of the experiment, in early 2018, FPC’s executive pastor gave institutional impetus for carrying forward with the direction of the project and for “mainstreaming” it into the life of the congregation. Because he had observed some of the apparent initial successes of the experiment, he asked that I lead a team with other members of our pastoral staff that would focus on transforming the “Cultivate” (discipleship) and “Impact” (mission) areas of FPC’s *Strategic Vision Plan* by applying the principles we had learned from our Huddle and Missional Community training into a wider array of new and existing ministry

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54. Appendix D includes a calendar and the topics for Phase II of the Huddle process.

55. I required that each new MC have at least one person on their leadership team who had been Huddled and had received the 3DM missional leadership training. It is advisable however to have at least four persons who have been Huddled on a new MCs launch leadership team. This allows the MC to multiply more easily in the future.

initiatives.<sup>56</sup> He requested this staff reorganization, first, because he recognized that culture change in these particular ministry areas would probably be the hardest to achieve. As a result, he believed that more pastoral focus and attention would be needed. Second, the goals of this thesis-project experiment were consistent with FPC’s *2016 Strategic Vision Plan* and so he desired to bring formal alignment between my efforts and those of the leaders of the wider church.

In his *2018 Staff Reorganizational Report* our executive pastor wrote to the session, outlining his rationale for this new “Cultivate-Impact” team: “Strategies need to be developed to ensure that FPC becomes a secure spiritual home for our members where they are effectively assimilated into the life of the church and are being equipped for ministry and service in our church and throughout our community and the world.”<sup>57</sup>

Further into the report, he added,

Creating a community infrastructure that both assimilates and keeps new people connected in a meaningful way to our church is essential.... We must create a secure home where people have a sense of belonging, are being cared for, are being spiritually nurtured, and are being equipped for discipleship. We must develop Life Communities in which our members are able to work out the implications of the Gospel cognitively and practically within networks of relationships.<sup>58</sup>

These statements and others in the report very much echoed the goals and strategies of the experiment I had been leading for over a year. It was becoming evident to me that the language, strategies and transformational elements I had been introducing were slowly becoming a part of the mainstream of the congregation’s life. With this additional institutional authorization, I began to commit even more of my time toward initiating a missional discipleship

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56. FPC’s *Strategic Vision Plan* describes the four main ministry areas at FPC as “Worship,” “Impact” (mission), “Cultivate” (discipleship/care/fellowship), and “Fortify” (stewardship, facilities, personnel, etc.).

57. “Minutes of the Session,” *Staff Reorganization Report*, March 26, 2018, First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC.

58. “Minutes of the Session.” For longer excerpts from the report see Appendix B.

movement at FPC as a strategy for answering the challenges raised by TAG report, our *2016 Strategic Vision Plan*, and the *Staff Reorganizational Report*.<sup>59</sup> Although most people in the congregation were still unfamiliar with the details of the experiment, my intervention was clearly moving from the outside of the organizational life of the church toward its center.

### **April-May 2018**

For the last phase of this experiment, I started my own MC with a team of leaders I had trained in my Huddles. This gave FPC a total of seven MCs by April 2018. Like our other MCs, this incarnational community included “UP-IN” gatherings on two Sunday nights per month and a monthly “OUT” event connected to a non-profit ministry called “Cross Culture Network” that works with international students in the Upstate of South Carolina.<sup>60</sup>

All through the second Phase of the experiment, I and others who had been Huddled continued to make presentations on MCs during the new covenant partner weekends in order to invite them to experience incarnational community. Members of our MCs also shared testimony with their friends about how their lives had been changed because of their involvement. Non-covenant partners who live in the neighborhoods where our MCs are located began to attend as well. On occasion, our MC leaders would hear these non-covenant partners make statements like, “MC is my church home.” A few of these people have joined FPC as covenant partners. By the end of the experiment, overall about one hundred and fifty persons were involved in FPC’s various MCs around Greenville.

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59. Appendix E contains my formal response to the *2018 Staff Reorganizational Report*.

60. “Cross Culture Network,” Joshua’s Way, accessed March 11, 2021, [www.joshuasway.org/cross-culture-network](http://www.joshuasway.org/cross-culture-network).

## **Analysis**

### **Discipleship 360 Assessment Survey Responses**

All of the participants in the experiment completed the 70-question survey “Discipleship 360 Assessment” pre-test near the beginning of the study in December 2016.<sup>61</sup> I received a 100% response rate once again when all of us completed the same survey in January 2020 as a post-test data collection point.<sup>62</sup> I analyzed the participants’ responses, excluding mine, by using a series of paired-samples t-tests in order to determine if there had been any statistically significant changes between the average scores (means) between their pre and post-tests for the eight Discipleship Core Qualities and the 20 Discipleship Characteristics that fall under the core qualities (see Table 1 for a list of the Core Qualities and their corresponding characteristics).<sup>63</sup> The results of the tests revealed various levels of growth within a number of categories.<sup>64</sup>

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61. The reader is reminded that the *Discipleship 360 Assessment* offers survey respondents a five-point Likert response scale.

62. By separating the pre and post-test survey and questionnaire by 38 months from the beginning of the experiment to the end, I hoped to better determine the long-range and potentially permanent impact on these leaders’ beliefs and skills related to disciple making rather than allowing the immediate euphoria of completing the experience to potentially affect the data.

63. A paired-samples t-test compares the means of two related groups to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between these means. T-test scores that have a probability of occurring by random chance of less than or equal to 0.05 indicate statistical significance.

64. Some participants asked others to respond to the “360” portion of the survey. Some participants did not. Given the subjective nature of the 360 responses and the uneven amount of data collected by this method, I decided not to use or analyze the 360 information provided in the surveys.

Table 1. Eight Discipleship Core Qualities and corresponding 20 Discipleship Characteristics

<b>Discipleship Core Qualities</b>	<b>20 Discipleship Characteristics</b>
1. Gospel Saturated Life	1A. Gospel Centered Actions
	1B. Gospel Centered Identity
2. Connected to God	2A. Prayer
	2B. Connecting with God through His Word
	2C. Incorporating Other Disciplines
3. Exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit	3A. Sacrificial Living
	3B. Gracious Living
	3C. Satisfied Living
	3D. Devoted Living
4. Understanding the Bible Story and the Bible's Impact on Life	4A. Old Testament
	4B. New Testament
	4C. Growth in Comprehension of Theological Knowledge
5. Understanding the Application of a Missional Incarnational Posture	5A. Understanding the Ministry of Jesus
	5B. Incarnational Posture
6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship	6A. Responding to Non-believers in Sharing Their Faith
	6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship
7. Community	7A. Local Congregation Commitment
	7B. Deeper Christian Community
8. Fulfills God's Call on their Lives	8A. Understanding of Gifts, Roles and Calling
	8B. Growing in Ministry Skill

Table 2. Eight Discipleship Core Qualities Ranked by Highest to Lowest Mean Change Among Participants

<b>Eight Discipleship Core Qualities</b>	<b>Change in mean score</b>	<b>T values</b>	<b>Statistical Significance (2-tailed)</b>
8. Fulfills God's Call on Their Lives	0.70833	4.150	0.001
6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship	0.69643	2.944	0.011
5. Understanding the Application of a Missional Incarnational Posture	0.61905	6.423	0.000
4. Understanding the Bible Story and the Bible's Impact on Life	0.57143	4.837	0.000
1. Gospel Saturated Life	0.54762	3.495	0.004
2. Connected to God	0.45238	2.710	0.018
7. Community	0.15476	0.987	0.341 <sup>(a)</sup>
3. Exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit	0		>0.050

(a) not statistically significant

Table 2 shows that the highest three areas of growth among the experiment's participants were in these Core Discipleship Qualities: "8. Fulfills God's Call on their Lives," "6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship," and "5. Understanding the Application of a Missional Incarnational Posture." Given that much of the training content of the experiment focused on "missional" disciple making it came as no surprise to me that there would be a higher degree of change in these areas than in the others which focused more on personal piety.<sup>65</sup> The lower mean change in "7. Community" is most readily explained by the fact that these participants were already highly committed to the congregational life of FPC including participating in our few community groups and, as such, they had much less of an opportunity to grow in this area.<sup>66</sup> The positive mean change in this quality was in fact so small the t-test determined it to be statistically insignificant. There was no mean score change among the participants in "3. Exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit." Since the focus and content of the experiment did not concentrate on this discipleship quality, it came as little surprise that there was apparently no change in this area.

The results of the paired-samples t-tests for the 20 Discipleship Characteristics (see Table 3) nearly mirrored the results of the Eight Core Qualities tests.

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65. The three discipleship qualities 4: Understanding the Bible Story and the Bible's Impact on Life, 1: Gospel Saturated Life, and 2: Connected to God reflect some of the more traditional areas of discipleship related to personal piety.

66. Note again that this is a "quasi" experiment and not a true experiment since participants for the experiment were not randomly chosen from the congregation. As noted previously, many of the participants were also members of a variety of community groups that had been meeting together for several years.

Table 3: 20 Discipleship Characteristics Ranked by Highest to Lowest Change in Mean Among Participants

<b>20 Discipleship Characteristics</b>	<b>Change in Mean Score</b>	<b>T values</b>	<b>Statistical Significance (2-tailed)</b>
6A. Responding to Non-believers in Sharing Their Faith	0.85714	3.229	0.007
8A. Understanding of Gifts, Roles and Calling	0.75000	4.364	0.001
8B. Growing in Ministry Skill	0.66667	2.844	0.014
3C. Satisfied Living	0.64286	3.634	0.003
5A. Understanding the Ministry of Jesus	0.61905	5.953	0.000
1B. Gospel Centered Identity	0.61905	3.976	0.002
5B. Incarnational Posture	0.61905	3.789	0.002
4A. Old Testament	0.61905	4.080	0.001
4B. New Testament	0.57143	4.305	0.001
6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship	0.53571	2.007	0.058 <sup>(a)</sup>
4C. Growth in Comprehension of Theological Knowledge	0.52381	3.465	0.004
1A. Gospel Centered Actions	0.47619	2.543	0.025
2B. Connecting with God through His Word	0.45238	2.111	0.55 <sup>(a)</sup>
2C. Incorporating Other Disciplines	0.45238	2.007	0.066 <sup>(a)</sup>
2A. Prayer	0.45238	2.924	0.012
3A. Sacrificial Living	0.42857	2.169	0.049 <sup>(b)</sup>
3B. Gracious Living	0.30000	2.329	0.037
3D. Devoted Living	0.17143	1.472	0.165 <sup>(a)</sup>
7B. Deeper Christian Community	0.16667	0.747	0.468 <sup>(a)</sup>
7A. Local Congregation Commitment	0.14286	1.194	0.254 <sup>(a)</sup>

(a) not statistically significant (b) approaching statistical significance

Once again, many of the sub-characteristics most closely associated with “missional” discipleship making displayed the highest degree of change in mean scores: “6A. Responding to Non-believers in Sharing Their Faith,” “8A. Understanding of Gifts, Roles and Calling,” and “8B. Growing in Ministry Skill.” The one result that I did not anticipate was the only mid-degree of growth associated with “6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship.” Since one of the main purposes of the experiment was to prepare the participants to disciple others, I anticipated that this mean change would have been higher relative to the other results. However, the data does reveal a positive degree of growth in this area. Discipleship characteristics related to

personal piety were notably lower in their changes in mean while the two characteristics related to Christian community and congregational involvement were once more the lowest in terms of degree of change.

With one notable exception, my own responses to the survey somewhat paralleled those of the participants'. According to the data, both the participants and I generally experienced some degree of growth in almost all of the Discipleship Qualities and Characteristics. But whereas the data suggests the other participants did certainly grow in "6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship," my responses appear to indicate that I experienced an even more dramatic increase in my own confidence and ability in regard to this area (see Table 4).

Table 4: Researcher's Eight Discipleship Core Qualities Highest to Lowest Change in Mean

<b>Eight Discipleship Core Qualities</b>	<b>Change in Mean Score</b>
6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship	3.0000
2. Connected to God	1.6667
8. Fulfills God's Call on Their Lives	1.5476
7. Community	1.5000
5. Understanding the Application of a Missional Incarnational Posture	1.5000
3. Exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit	0.8500
1. Gospel Saturated Life	0.5000
4. Understanding the Bible Story and the Bible's Impact on Life	0.3333

Our responses to the two characteristics associated with "6. Engaging Others Toward Discipleship" seem to reflect this same phenomenon. Again, although the other participants experienced some growth in characteristics 6A and 6B, my responses suggest that my greatest transformation occurred in these specific portions of the assessment (see Table 5).

Table 5: Researcher's 20 Discipleship Characteristics Highest to Lowest Change in Mean

<b>Researcher's 20 Discipleship Characteristics Highest to Lowest Change in Mean</b>	<b>Change in Mean Score</b>
6B: Establishing New Believers in Discipleship	3.2500
6A: Responding to Non-believers in Sharing Their Faith	2.6667
2C: Incorporating Other Disciplines	2.3333
7B: Deeper Christian Community	2.0000
8B: Growing in Ministry Skill	1.6667
5A: Understanding the Ministry of Jesus	1.6667
3C: Satisfied Living	1.4000
5B: Incarnation Posture	1.3333
2B: Connecting with God through His Word	1.3333
2A: Prayer	1.3333
8A: Understanding of Gifts, Roles and Calling	1.2500
7A: Local Congregation Commitment	1.0000
3D: Devoted Living	1.0000
1A: Gospel Centered Actions	1.0000
3B: Gracious Living	0.8000
4A: Old Testament	0.3333
4B: New Testament	0.3333
4C: Growth in Comprehension of Theological Knowledge	0.3333
3A: Sacrificial Living	0.2000
1B: Gospel Centered Identity	0.0000

In order to understand why my responses were so markedly different than the average of the other fourteen respondents, I looked specifically at our scores for the four questions that comprise characteristic “6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship” (see Table 6).

Table 6: Comparison of Scores for Characteristic 6B: “Establishing New Believers in Discipleship”

<b>Characteristic 6B: “Establishing New Believers in Discipleship”</b>	<b>2016 Responses Average Participant Scores/Researcher Score</b>	<b>2020 Responses Average Participant Scores/Researcher Score</b>
Q. 1: This individual has relationships with less mature believers for the purpose of helping them mature.	3.92/1	3.85/4
Q. 2: This individual is able to reproduce spiritual practices in the lives of other believers.	3.15/1	4.28/5
Q. 3: This individual understands the fundamentals of life in Christ that need to be taught to newer believers.	3.46/2	3.57/4
Q. 4: This individual models spiritual disciplines in a way that helps other believers learn the disciplines.	2.61/1	3.42/5

The average of these four scores for the participants in 2016 was 3.28 compared to my average of 1.25. I believe that the remarkable disparity in these initial scores might be attributable to one or more of these factors: 1) the participants may indeed have been more adept than I at discipling others despite the fact that I have almost twenty-five years of pastoral experience; 2) the participants may have an increased opportunity for contact with non-believers and un-discipled covenant partners because the church system in which I operate rewards me for ministry to covenant partners rather than for outreach and interaction with non-churched people; 3) the participants could have been experiencing what 3DM calls “unconscious incompetence” in that many tend to enter the 3DM disciple-making process with a high degree of enthusiasm and confidence without realizing how much more they need to know about discipling others; and 4) I was acutely aware of my own incompetence in the area of disciple making because of the

coaching I had already received from 3DM in the months before taking the survey.<sup>67</sup> As a result, in some sense I became my own harshest critic.

In 2020, the average score for the other participants in the experiment grew to 3.78 for the four questions in characteristic 6B. My average score soared to 4.5. The changes in my responses appear to demonstrate a long-term and significant transformation in my skills, activities and self-perception as a missional discipleship equipper and multiplier.

### Questionnaire Responses

At the same time the participants completed their post-test online survey, they also responded to the two retrospective questions I chose before the experiment began which are related to their experience in and after the study: “What is the most important thing you will take away from your experience in Huddle and your participation/leadership in MC?” and “Knowing what you know now, how could that experience have been improved?” As I read through their responses, a number of themes emerged for me.<sup>68</sup> Many of the respondents noted the benefit of developing a “common language” for making disciples, leading MCs and changing the ministry culture at FPC.<sup>69</sup> In their responses, they both referred to and used Breen’s LifeShapes to

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67. The reader may recall that I selected these participants because in my estimation they either were or had the potential to be high-capacity leaders in the life of FPC.

3DM calls the initial phase in the discipling process “D1.” Here, participants enter the Huddle process with high enthusiasm and confidence but with low experience and competence (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 142). As the 3DM discipling process continues, the Huddled participant becomes aware of his or her own incompetence and inexperience. 3DM calls this “D2” on the Leadership Square LifeShape and maintains that it is the most important phase in the development of a disciple-maker because it is where God molds the disciple the most. By offering time, vision and grace the Huddle leader coaches the participant to stay in the D2 phase as long as possible so that the participant can learn all that God would teach them (Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 146-147).

68. Appendix F contains all of the participant’s responses to the Questionnaire.

69. “The Life Shapes I learned in Huddle have helped me develop a ‘common language’ for understanding and engaging in disciple making. Although not all the Shapes themselves are as much a part of my common language now after 3 years, the Learning Circle, the Up/In/Out Triangle, and the Rhythm of Life of Pendulum are

describe the ways in which their own discipleship was enhanced. Most frequently cited were the “UP/IN/OUT Relationship Triangle” which points to the three fundamental relationships Jesus taught his followers to model and maintain, and the “Learning Circle” LifeShape which helps disciples hear and respond to the voice of God in their lives.<sup>70</sup> One participant lamented that her spouse was not able to join in the Huddle process and thus they were not able to share in the discipleship language she had learned to appreciate.<sup>71</sup>

Other respondents noted how for the first time in their lives that had learned to integrate their walk with Christ into their daily lives beyond Sunday morning worship attendance.<sup>72</sup> Of

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still frequently spoken about in our MC Leadership team meetings and in our MC itself. I have also applied the Leadership Square LifeShape in many areas of my life: I do, you watch; I do, you help; you do, I help; you do, I watch” (Respondent 9: male). “Learning and using a common language that we reference, even now, three years later. Learning a way to process significant life events through the Learning Circle LifeShape and seasons of rest and work through the Semi-circle LifeShape. Learning to be a disciple and learning to make disciples” (Respondent 5: female). “The importance of forming a common language to build community. In particular, building smaller communities who then connect to others in the church body because of what they have in common. Communities are built on commonalities and common language, which is a “tie that binds”” (Respondent 8: female, deacon).

70. See Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 75-88; cf. Mark. 1:15. “UP” refers to Jesus’ intimate relationship with his Father. “IN” points to his relationship with his disciples, and “OUT” highlights his love for and connection with the world (See Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 113-122; cf. Luke. 6:12, 13-16, 17-19; 10:17). Respondent 3 (female, elected as elder after experiment) noted the importance of “being intentional and increasingly balanced in our rhythms of the UP/IN/OUT LifeShape in our everyday lives.” Respondent 11 (male, deacon) highlighted his improvement in the “IN” dynamic of the Relationship Triangle: “The balance in the LifeShape Up/In/Out. I assume most gravitate towards one or two, but rarely all 3. Therefore, we must be intentional about our actions/activities to ensure we are satisfying all 3. My area of improvement was my ‘IN’, and the Lord has helped me grow significantly over the past few years with dedicated, more consistent quiet time. My prior experience was more sporadic, primarily focused on biblical knowledge and less about my relationship with Christ. I still have to intentionally push this discipline but quiet time has become much more of a joy in my walk with the Lord.” “I have learned that to hear God’s voice in my life and to develop action plans with accountability in response to that voice requires intentionality and active discernment on my part” (Respondent 10: male, deacon).

71. “The one thing that comes to mind that might have improved my Huddle experience would have been for my spouse to have been able to have participated simultaneously (or soon thereafter), as having a common language of discipling is certainly beneficial as a couple on mission. He is heavily involved in discipleship as well, and while we are both getting at the same end-goal, he has a different vocabulary/set of paradigms that he uses fluidly” (Respondent 3: female, elected elder after experiment).

72. “The most important thing I have learned through Huddle/MC participation is that our Christian lives should not be separated from our day-to-day living, but should influence every part of it. I was too much of the mindset that my church life was Sunday morning and maybe Wednesday night and that participating in events on these days would fulfill the requirement to ‘serve God.’ This was the way I (and a lot of folks) was raised to do church. Through the Huddle and MC processes, for myself and as a family our walk with Christ has become much richer than it could ever be from just attending corporate worship. We have friends we gather with regularly for fun

particular importance to these and other respondents were the ways their spouses and children were now experiencing Christian community in the MCs they were a part of as a family.<sup>73</sup>

Several of the participants made reference to the teaching on APEST and wished that more time could have been devoted to training in this area.<sup>74</sup> Breen's APEST material apparently was new to almost all of them, and the impact it made on their leadership approach prompted them to encourage me to share it with a wider audience in the church.

Though I noted in my analysis of the online survey responses that growth in characteristic “6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship” did not quite reach the height of some other of the characteristics associated with missional discipleship, a few of the participants did highlight the importance of making other disciples as a vital aspect of following Jesus.<sup>75</sup> Their written responses lead me to believe that this call to obedience from Matthew 28 has become an integral part of their understanding of what it means to walk with Christ.

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and for worship, and they are walking alongside us helping us to grow. We are finding new ways to serve, both in church and in the community” (Respondent 2: male, deacon). “I came to see how important it is to integrate discipleship into the life and vibrancy of the church and the life and vibrancy of us as individuals. I also came to better understand the principles Jesus taught and the practices he used” (Respondent 6: male). “Discipleship is the central theme to Huddle and the quality of my walk with Christ is truly central to all aspects of my life, e.g. marriage, parenting, leading a MC, etc.” (Respondent 10: male, deacon).

73. “Christ is now at the center of our family’s weekly schedule, but in a very natural and not forced way. It has been a joy to watch the children in our MC embrace this new culture. They can’t imagine living any other way and this will certainly influence their Christian lives as adults” (Respondent 2: male, deacon). “I have a closer relationship with my spouse,...and I have ‘relational capital’ with dozens of people now that I can use judiciously for building the Kingdom” (Respondent 7: male, elected elder after experiment).

74. “I discovered I have a base APEST gifting but I have also strengthened some of my other gifts as I have exercised them.... Spend more time on APEST and less time on other content that less academic people find impractical” (Respondent 7: male, elected elder after experiment). “I also think the APEST information was not given due diligence. It’s a place I believe the movement toward Huddle and MC has floundered or struggled at times. I also see that problem paralleled in our church at large and think it is a place leaders need to continue to improve” (Respondent 12: female).

75. “The most important thing that I have taken away from my experience in Huddle is that to be a disciple of Jesus, and to be a missional church, we have to be making new disciples” (Respondent 3: female, elected elder after experiment). “Go and make Disciples. I realize this is a command from Jesus, an imperative statement, but I did not know ‘HOW’ to go and make disciples. My experience in Huddle and MC gives me practical things to do but at the same time leaves room for me to make it my own. Listen to how the Spirit is leading us and give others tools to also go and make disciples” (Respondent 4: male, deacon).

Numerous respondents emphasized two areas in which they felt their experience could have been improved. The first has to do with helping their MCs identify an outreach opportunity (“OUT”) in the community. Missional engagement in the community is the main element that differentiates an MC from a traditional community group or Bible study. Many of these MC leaders expressed frustration over finding and mobilizing their MCs around missional commitments.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, in their MC Leader training, I underscored the difficulty they would probably face in identifying their “OUT” and in focusing their MCs on a single missional relationship that would be distinctive to their incarnational community.

The second area in which participants believed their experience could have been improved had to do with the duration of the Huddle/MC Leader training regime. Several of the respondents believed the training was too long.<sup>77</sup> One other participant held, however, that the goals and nature of the Huddle experience requires a lengthy commitment.<sup>78</sup>

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76. “I think it is very important for a MC to take on a ‘formal’ mission (‘OUT’) as soon as possible. Even if you try one out for a while, decide it doesn’t work for you and then try another, it is important to get started. For too long we found our MC looking for a mission to support but we let the logistical challenges of young kids and a geographically scattered MC prevent us from settling on one. The MC experience is not complete without a mission that everyone is participating in” (Respondent 2: male, deacon). “I continue to learn things weekly about leading an MC and here are MY experiences: finding a balance between discipleship and outreach is hard and getting people excited about an ‘OUT’ is even harder. People seem to prefer the intimacy of a smaller group and they have a myriad of reasons why they can’t/won’t host MC in their homes. It requires a long-term, intensive relational commitment and it is a marathon rather than a sprint” (Respondent 5, female). “Be more proactive with helping people select an OUT before forming a MC” (Respondent 7: male, elected elder after experiment). “I would also add more hands on leadership to MC for finding places they can serve. I have heard a lot of paralysis in this area (OUT)” (Respondent 12: female).

77. “Shorten Huddle. The 30 weeks is too long. There are too many shapes” (Respondent 7: male, elected elder after experiment). “Our huddle process went well over a year [probably closer to 18 months]. This time frame needs to be drastically reduced” (Respondent 11: male, deacon). “If there was any way to shorten the Huddle process I think that would be an improvement. I know it would probably be difficult to trim it down, but I feel like the time commitment does deter some people, and if it were shorter it would be more appealing” (Respondent 13: female).

78. “I think we may need to put more focus on the fact that the Huddle process should not be treated as a short-term experience. It takes time, practice, and deep reflection in order for long-term change to take effect in the way we think, behave and lead. I initially approached Huddle as a quick course that I would exit with all the tools I needed, but after going through it, I realize how it continues to impact all of my life in a much more foundational way” (Respondent 10: male, deacon).

## Summary

Though the relatively low number of participants in this experiment makes it difficult to generalize, the data from the survey and the questionnaire seem to indicate that there was some meaningful degree of positive transformation in terms of the disciple-making beliefs and behaviors of those who were involved in this study. This includes myself. It appears that much of our growth occurred in those areas most closely associated with “missional” discipleship. This includes sharing our faith with non-believers, grasping our giftedness and calling, growing in ministry skill, and understanding and applying the incarnational posture of Jesus into our lives.

It is also very evident from the survey responses from the other participants that they have embraced the 3DM language and the biblical principles behind it as a way of expressing some of their deepest convictions related to their personal callings and their lives with Christ. In many of their responses, the reader can see them endeavoring to integrate what they believe to be true about an authentic missional Christian life into their own habits, routines and relationships.

Very significantly, twelve of the fourteen participants became leaders of their own MCs before the conclusion of the experiment in May of 2018. Three of them became Huddle leaders.<sup>79</sup> All fourteen of the participants remain highly involved in various ways in the life and ministry of FPC and have become “evangelists” for the call to intentional disciple making and missional community building. Between their efforts and the others who had been discipled by other members of the Staff Huddle, a burgeoning missional discipleship multiplication movement appears to be forming at FPC.

My own apparent transformation as a result of this experiment is certainly noteworthy especially in light of my survey responses related to the Qualities and Characteristics that are

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79. The effort to introduce a missional discipleship movement at FPC extended beyond my efforts in this experiment. Two other members of the Staff Huddle started Huddles and MCs shortly after I did.

associated with “missional” discipleship. My specific growth in characteristic “6B. Establishing New Believers in Discipleship” seems to indicate that by the end of the experiment I was much more competent and confident in my ability to train and model for others a strategy for missional disciple making.

There was also a concomitant change in my identity as pastoral leader. As a result of my experience in this experiment, I started to see myself and operate more as an equiper-multiplier rather than merely as a deliverer of ministry. In other words, instead of merely calling others to change, I began to embody the transformation myself.

As a third-chair associate pastor, I also found myself better prepared to steward the congregation I serve through the transformational journey called for by our 2014 TAG report, 2016 *Strategic Vision Plan*, and 2018 *Staff Reorganization Report*. Part of that change involves moving the ministry culture of FPC from a centralized, staff-dependent, attractional model to a more decentralized missional approach that equips its covenant partners to engage in meaningful, relational ministry beyond the walls of the church and that engages younger populations in discipleship. Though the ultimate trajectory of this missional discipleship multiplication movement at FPC remains to be seen, the data seems to suggest that this experiment may have been an effective launching point for initiating ministry culture transformation at FPC.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTCOMES

#### **Summary of the Project and Outline of the Chapter**

In chapter one of this thesis-project, I situated First Presbyterian Church's challenges with discipling its covenant partners and connecting to the neighborhoods around her within the larger backdrop of the mainline Protestant Church's decline in the West. Historic congregations like FPC that have inherited a Reformation ministry culture are facing a number of high hurdles related to preparing their covenant partners for disciple making and missional living in a progressively post-Christendom milieu. Among these difficulties are the seeming inadequacy of the traditional classroom format for disciple making and the unsustainable cycle of the attractional, programmatic church growth strategy that focuses on meeting consumer demands for excellent religious goods and services at a central campus location. Rather than helping the Church in the West fulfill her Christ-given commission to make disciples, indications are that both of these approaches are now generating more and more diminishing returns.

In order to respond to this broader question of ministry and mission in the West, I focused on addressing some of the unique challenges facing the congregation where I serve as an associate pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina. FPC is a relatively large congregation of over 2,700 covenant partners located in one of the most dynamic small cities in the United States. However, despite the dramatic population growth in Greenville, FPC has experienced only a small increase in worship attendance while membership numbers have continued to stagnate and decline unabated for the last twenty years.

At least four different motivations combined to propel me toward engaging in this thesis-project. The first was a desire to close FPC's pronounced "backdoor" phenomenon. Second, I

wanted to forthrightly address some of FPC's ministry weaknesses revealed in its 2014 TAG report. These weaknesses included relationship building especially among younger adults, staff dependence, and an inability to connect covenant partners with meaningful ministry. Third, my heart went out to many of the covenant partners in the church who were becoming increasingly confounded in their attempts to disciple others and to connect with their unchurched neighbors around them. FPC covenant partners are motivated by the Gospel. They believe that Jesus Christ matters. They are just unsure of how to connect the faith they have in Christ with an increasingly secular, hurting and distracted world. Fourth, my attendance at the 2015 Exponential Conference convinced me that there were demonstrably effective ministry approaches being pioneered around the world that could be adapted for FPCs unique ministry context. An apostle by nature, I wanted to explore some of these options.

In order to address some of the adaptive challenges FPC is facing, I chose one intervention point in order to see if and to what degree some measure of long-term transformation might occur in the values, habits and behaviors of a select few high-capacity leaders who were committed to the ministry of the church. That intervention was introduced at the organizational edges of the congregation as an experiment in missional disciple making. Since a growing body of literature is suggesting that micro-church expressions are becoming an effective strategy for reaching the West, I chose Mike Breen's approach to missional disciple making which features a leadership development cohort called "Huddle" and an incarnational living strategy termed "Missional Community." By engaging in a two-phased experiment, I sought to discover whether Breen's method might help to initiate a missional discipleship multiplication movement at FPC. I led this experiment as a "third chair," associate pastor within the staffing structure of the church by using an equipping model I adapted from Greg Ogden's

understanding of the three-fold meaning of the NT word *katartismos*. This three-fold model became the biblical rubric that directed my overall transformation strategy. The model entails laying ecclesiastical foundations, deciding upon specialized training for disciple making and employing adaptive principles in order to align the congregation with the biblical vision of Christ's Church and its *2016 Strategic Vision Plan*.

The data collected before and after the experiment seem to indicate that some measure of transformation did occur among the participants in the experiment. This includes myself. Though it is difficult to quantify the exact degree of change in terms of our beliefs and behaviors related to disciple making and incarnational living, I believe that a number of tentative conclusions may be drawn for both FPC's ministry culture and the broader family of other historic mainline churches in North America which have inherited a traditional Reformation approach to disciple making and pastoral leadership.

My conclusions in this chapter will be formed around my three-fold equipping outline. Here, I will offer a number of ideas related to how a pastor might pursue some of the preliminary findings I assert. After my conclusions are described, I will turn to what I consider to be some of the key elements of the project that have yet to be developed and how, in retrospect, I believe the experiment could have been conducted more effectively. Finally, I will share how I think this project will shape my ministry in the future and what other areas of inquiry and ministry skill enhancement I would like to pursue.

## **Conclusions**

### Lay Ecclesiastical Foundations

In order for a Reformation-heritage congregation to be missionally effective in our current and future Western cultural context, I believe that a transformational pastor must begin by laying an ecclesiastical foundation for the church he or she serves that is both biblically grounded and contextually appropriate. This ecclesiology will be typified by these assertions.

#### **God is a Sending God who Sends his People**

In chapter two, I demonstrated that the Triune God of the Scriptures is by nature a sending God. The Church is comprised of the sent people of God who are invited to participate actively in God's mission to redeem all of creation. The Church follows the pattern of Jesus who incarnated himself among the people he was called to reach. This includes doing life in close proximity with them rather than merely inviting them to attend worship and program events. For a congregation like FPC which is so committed to the authority of Scripture, it is important to ground its ecclesiology not only in practical missional effectiveness but in the revealed and eternal character of God.

#### **North America is no longer an Evangelistic Field, it is a Mission Field<sup>1</sup>**

FPC's covenant partners are evangelicals. They believe in evangelism. However, they are grappling with the fact that Greenville is becoming more of a mission field than an evangelism field. The difference between evangelism and mission is a matter of degree. Evangelism occurs

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1. Darrell Gruder comments, "If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become then missionary churches?" (Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015], 11.)

when the believer communicating the Gospel shares the same general culture and worldview of the hearer. Mission happens when the sharer must cross several cultural barriers in order to be understood by the recipient of the message. Because of a number of factors, North American culture is gradually moving away from a worldview that is assumed by the Church. As such, the Church's ministry plan should not assume that its neighbors will be immediately inclined to seek or desire the Christian life and, as a result, they may not be attracted to the church's campus. In FPC's case, she cannot build a ministry approach that seeks to "Transform the Heart of the City" without including an intentional strategy for going *to* the city.

### **Missional Churches both Gather and Scatter Intentionally**

In this project, I have proposed that FPC should adopt an ecclesial model that includes Missional Communities which "scatter" into the congregation's neighborhoods and networks of relationships for mission and ministry and then "gather" on Sundays for worship with covenant partners and others from around the city. As the congregation engages in this rhythm of witness, she will be participating in the Holy Spirit's centripetal and centrifugal action upon the life of the Church and recovering the NT, early Church and some Medieval forms of Church life.

The key words here are "balance" and "both/and." Most traditional mainline congregations like FPC usually have a very strong history of directing time and resources toward their Sunday morning gatherings but almost no sense of how or why they should devote an equal amount of energy to intentionally scattering as mid-sized communities throughout the week. Frequently, when a pastor talks about introducing MCs into the life of the congregation, covenant partners may hear, "The pastor doesn't care about worship anymore!" This is simply not the case. The intent is not to eliminate or diminish corporate worship but to redress the

imbalance by adding MCs and integrating the two. In this way, the congregation can take advantage of the strengths of both the modalic and sodalic forms of the Church's witness.<sup>2</sup> As long as historic mainline congregations like FPC continue to try and reach their communities by excellent worship and attractive buildings alone, they will perpetuate a consumer ministry culture.<sup>3</sup>

## The Church is at Heart an Organic, Viral Movement, not an Institution

Jesus compared the coming of the Kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed and the addition of a small amount of leaven into bread dough.<sup>4</sup> His message, of course, was that God's Kingdom may start out from small and seemingly insignificant beginnings, but eventually big things will come. Missional authors have combined these parables with other insights from the created order, namely that of the field of virology to describe the nature of the Church. Just as seeds, bacteria and viruses all contain a simple DNA which make it possible for them to spread easily and reproduce exponentially, so individual covenant partners should be formed to embody

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2. "The truth of the matter is we need both (the attractional and missional impulse of the Church) to work in tandem together; we need both to realize their unique purpose... What we find in Missional Communities is the ability to do both. The ability to have a pioneering, low-maintenance, laity-driven vehicle on the frontlines of the missional frontier being resourced and equipped by a mission center where everyone can gather, celebrate what God has done, look to what he will do, experience a bigger story, and go back into the mission fields" (Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* [Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2015], 52-53). "The idea of the AND is that every church can find a balance of both scattering people out for mission while maintaining a biblically meaningful reason to gather together" (Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 124).

3. "If you want worship, mission must take priority. That is where you must begin. Because if you start with a culture of mission, you get worshippers. But if you start with a culture of worship, you get worship services" (From the section, "The Law of Mission: Real Church Growth Starts with a Culture of Mission not Worship" in Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* [Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2020], 101. Mancini and Hartman go on to add that when a church emphasizes a culture of worship over a culture of mission several unintended messages are typically communicated including: "Church is a place you go to [versus a family on mission everywhere].... Church is a dispensary of services [versus a productive community].... Ministry is for professionals [versus an opportunity for every believer].... An unbeliever's first point of contact with the church is the largest programmed event [versus their relationship with a believing friend outside church walls]" (Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 103).

4. Matthew 13:31-33.

and reproduce a simple spiritual DNA in others. The result will be a viral missional discipleship multiplication movement. Of course, as this project has shown, such a process always involves people who are variously gifted and in different seasons of life. As a result, the growth trajectory will never be perfect nor linear. However, the advantage of this approach is that it has the potential for exponential growth because it is accessible, reproducible and scalable. Institutions are by nature none of these.

### **The True Church is Defined by its Biblical, Irreducible DNA**

Before this project, I did not realize there is so much unanimity among missional authors regarding their understanding of the irreducible components of Church. Neil Cole calls this DNA “Divine Truth,” “Nurturing Relationships,” and “Apostolic Mission.” Mike Breen simply terms it “UP/IN/OUT.”<sup>5</sup>

I, like almost all Reformation-heritage pastors, have been trained to believe that the “True Marks of the Church” are associated with right preaching, right administration of the sacraments and the right administration of discipline. I have concluded that this traditional, Christendom-era formulation is no longer adequate for a missional context because it is neither scalable nor reproducible. First, it necessitates the presence of an ordained pastor for an authentic church experience to occur. Ordained pastors are expensive and cannot be trained fast enough for the needs of a true missionary context. Second, tradition dictates that the “Marks” are beyond the purview of an average believer to perform. Any believer can be trained to embody and reproduce the DNA of which Cole and Breen write, and they can do this at every strata of a congregation’s life, that is, at an individual, MC and corporate level. The UP/IN/OUT definition of Church is

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5. For a review of how Cole, Breen and various other missional authors describe this ecclesial DNA, see Appendix C.

patterned after the life of Jesus and demonstrated in the New Testament's picture of the early Church.<sup>6</sup> As such, it may actually represent a more truly *reformed* ecclesiology because it is so closely wedded to God's revelation in his Word.

### **The Biblical Vision of Church as *Oikos***

Though the term “family” appears to be a loaded word in many areas of contemporary Western culture, the NT firmly associates the Church with familial relationships within an extended household (*oikos*). One of the key and most difficult tasks of a transformational pastor is to propagate this notion of the Church as an extended family on mission. MCs are an ideal context for reintroducing the biblical vision of *oikos* and for restoring family from the detrimental assaults of Western individualism.

For a large church like FPC with such a pronounced backdoor phenomenon, it is imperative, as our *2016 Strategic Vision Plan* and *2018 Staff Reorganization Report* declares, that covenant partners find a “secure home” where they can “have a sense of belonging, are being cared for, are being spiritually nurtured and are being equipped in discipleship.” *Oikos* provides this all-important context, or as Breen calls it, a “texture” for mission and discipleship in which covenant partners can “work out the implications of the gospel cognitively and practically within networks of relationships.”<sup>7</sup>

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6. Acts 2:42-47.

7. Mike Breen and Sally Breen, *Family on Mission: Integrating Discipleship into the Fabric of our Lives*, second edition (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2018), introduction; 2018 FPC Staff Reorganization Report (Appendix B).

## **A Missional Church Needs Pastors who are Equiper-Multipliers**

Most Reformation-heritage pastors have been taught that the key to a growing church is better preaching, teaching, pastoral care and administration. The implication of this model is that all serious and consequential ministry flows from the pastor's efforts. Covenant partners are sheep to be cared for and passive students to be taught and inspired by the pastor's messages.

This model of ministry may have been effective in the Christendom era, but in a missionary context, a pastor must acquire at least two additional competencies: the knowledge and ability to initiate and steward a lay-led, missional discipleship multiplication movement and the adaptive skills to environmentally engineer the ministry culture of the congregation he or she serves. To be adept in both of these areas the pastor must become an equiper-multiplier rather than simply a deliverer of ministry.

The pastor-as-equiper-multiplier model may be the most important element for transforming a church's consumer culture into an empowering one. In this approach, the pastor chooses a select group of high-capacity leaders and disciples them in a way that they can use to disciple others. By leading by example and embodying the very things he or she is asking his or her covenant partners to do, the pastor will create an equipping environment where disciples multiply disciples. As a result of this approach, the clericalism that is so endemic to mainline Reformed ecclesiology may begin to dissipate both in the hearts and minds of the covenant partners as well as in that of the pastor(s).

In order for pastors to make this transition, they will have to change their emotional reward systems. Instead of finding delight in their own ministry alone, they must learn to celebrate the ministry successes of others. This can be a very hard transition for many pastors to make, but the Scriptures teach that the only way to ministry faithfulness is through surrender and

death to control and ego. Co-dependent relationships by their nature are difficult to disrupt. In order to do so, the pastor must begin to differentiate him or herself from the system by defining his or her appropriate, biblical role in the congregation.

### **Choose an Every-Member Disciple-Making Method**

Most pastors who have been educated in a traditional mainline seminary model, will probably have to augment their training in order to become adept disciple makers and modelers of incarnational living. There are many training resources in this regard from which to choose including the three that I reviewed in chapter three. Discipleship.org has over 30 discipling organizations who are a part of their collective. There are a number of criterion a pastor should consider when deciding upon a missional discipleship resource.

First, make sure that the resource calls for and assists with helping to multiply disciples. Most traditional small group materials include no provision for this. They assume that once the curriculum is complete the same leaders will take the group through another topic.

Second, ensure that the disciple-making method you use assumes that the cohort you are leading is embedded in an incarnational community that includes life-on-life interaction. Some discipleship studies only call for a classroom or small accountability group format.

Third, make sure that the cohort experience lasts a long time. Jesus evidently believed that the acquisition of discipleship skills and behavior modification requires an extended period of training for these to take effect because he trained his disciples for more than three years. Indeed, Eugene H. Peterson says that discipleship and disciple making requires “a long obedience in the same direction.”<sup>8</sup> Although all of us have been taught by Western culture that

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8. From the title of his book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2000). “There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is

there is a “quick fix” for just about everything that ails us, the truth of the matter is it takes a long time to learn and un-learn patterns of behavior. Despite some of the comments from participants in the experiment who wanted the Huddle process shortened, it is my contention that it should not be. As the early Church catechesis process demonstrates, learning to become and teach others to be followers of Jesus in a post-Christian, missionary context simply takes a long time.

Fourth, if the key to creating a missional movement is reproducibility, then the key to discipleship life-change is accountability. The pastor should ensure that some mechanism for accountability is included in the discipleship approach that is chosen. If not, then the experience will degenerate into another class filled with religious information that may or may not be embraced.

Fifth, choose a missional discipleship model that is “obedience based.” By this, I mean to make sure that it not only challenges the participant to discern God’s voice in his or her life but also to respond to it. Thankfully, much like the surprising unanimity among missional authors for the language they use to describe the irreducible DNA of the Church, there is also an interesting similarity in the essential discipleship questions they propose for the heart of their disciple-making processes. For example, in his LifeShape, the “Learning Circle,” Breen uses the questions “What is God saying to you?” and “What are you going to do about it?”<sup>9</sup> Neil Cole recommends that participants in his Life Transformation Groups should “listen to Jesus and do what He says.”<sup>10</sup> Don Everts proposes “The Discipleship Cycle” where followers of Jesus hear

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little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness” (Peterson, *A Long Obedience*, 16).

9. Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*. 3rd ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2016), 70.

10. Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically From the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 134-135.

the Word, respond with action and then debrief in community.<sup>11</sup> J. R. Woodward advocates for a tool based on the Jesuit practice of *examen* for mutual discipleship and discernment. Here, two or three disciples meet together and ask, “What is God doing in/around/through me?” and “What will I do?”<sup>12</sup> The similarities between these questions are obvious. These practitioners all call for an obedient response to the voice of God in the Jesus-follower’s life.

Using the criteria set above, the pastor should choose *one* of the many resources for missional disciple making that are available in the marketplace. It is important not to mix and match these approaches, however, as the congregation’s language for disciple making will soon become confused. The written responses from the participants in the experiment are peppered with Breen’s discipleship language. All of us who have been through the Huddle process know the exact meaning of all these terms. Language builds culture. Make sure the language adopted serves to build the kind of culture God is calling to be created.

### **Use Adaptive Skills to Align the Congregation with Scripture and its Vision**

#### **Organizational Alignment Comes from Above, Movement from Below**

Real and lasting change and movement begins small and at the organizational edges of a congregation.<sup>13</sup> Movements rarely result from declarations by the church’s leadership core which

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11. Donald Everts, Douglas Schaupp, and Valerie Gordon, *Breaking the Huddle: How Your Community Can Grow its Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 97-103.

12. J. R. Woodward and Dan White, Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 108-109.

13. As noted in chapters three and four, Bolsinger recommends that when introducing adaptive change in the life of a congregation one should do so from the ‘edges’ of a church’s organizational structure rather than at the center of its leadership core: “The early experiments should not cost a lot of money, disrupt the organizational chart, upset the center of the church life too much or be taken too seriously yet. They should instead be opportunities to try some things and see how the system reacts” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121). By inviting members of the Diaconate instead of the Session to participate in the experiment, I was able to conduct the project without much concern for its progress or failure. Also, by concentrating the experiment among the Deacons, I was not required to submit regular reports to Sessional committees which allowed me to spend less of my day producing time-

pronounce that covenant partners should do this or that. Instead, movement starts at the granular level when a leader embodies the “words, works and ways” of a missional follower of Jesus and then he or she multiplies the habits and life-rhythms of Christ they have found into the lives of individual disciples who are relationally trained in community to train others. Movements come from below. They are organic.

Alignment, however, can come from the top of the organization. Alignment creates the context from which movement can occur and grow. It provides resources and the risk-taking space for experimental movements to flourish. Thus, it is imperative that a transformational pastor leads both from the bottom/outside up and from the top/center down. The intuitional life of the congregation cannot be ignored. However, the pastor must understand the limited range of impact the administrative arm of a church has on its ministry culture.

The FPC staff and lay leadership core invested a large number of resources in developing its 2014 TAG report, its *2016 Strategic Vision Plan* and its *2018 Staff Realignment Report*. Conclusions were drawn on paper and emphases and initiatives were pronounced. But other than the challenges that could be solved relatively quickly by hiring new staff and building new facilities (technical solutions), most of the weaknesses pointed out in these documents required resilient, transformational leadership to address. For example, the charge from the *Strategic Vision Plan* to equip ourselves “to engage in radical, Gospel-centered relationships” cannot be answered by putting people through a six-week class on evangelism. Rather, it must come from life-on-life engagement in community with a skilled evangelist who trains, deploys and keeps

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consuming reports. I was not attempting to avoid accountability (Deacons participating in the project gave regular reports to the Diaconate and I provided updates to the Executive Pastor), rather I aimed to lead and assess the effectiveness of the project before it became popular throughout broader governance structure of the church. This strategy accomplished two goals. First, it circumvented any confusion or perceived threat to the existing ministry structures of the congregation. Second, it allowed participants to fully develop their own testimony before being asked to publically share their positive or negative experiences concerning the experiment.

accountable the disciple who wants to be a better evangelist. Likewise, the call issued from the TAG report to move from a staff dependent, ministry-delivery model requires pastors and staff to do the hard work of redefining themselves as equipper-multipliers in the face of consumer demands. Simply doing the same things we've always done, only better, will not serve to ready a church for its new and changing missional context.

The hypothesis for this project proposed that a pastor's own leadership approach can have a central impact in addressing these adaptive issues raised in these documents if he or she begins to act as a transformational agent both at the top and bottom of the organizational life of the church. In the case of my experiment at FPC, my role was to serve as a catalytic agent for a self-replicating disciple-making movement that both gathers and scatters into its community with intentional purpose. The limited outcomes of my experiment seem to demonstrate the possibility that if a pastor functions in this way, some transformation may result in the ministry culture of a large historic congregation like FPC.

### **Do not Violate the Code**

The center of FPC's code is corporate worship, excellent facilities, and classroom learning based on the Word of God. As they say in Dallas and Houston, "Don't mess with Texas!" Transformational authors repeatedly implore pastors not to violate the code of the congregation. Instead, it should only be carefully built upon and adapted for the church's missionary context.

In light of this adaptive leadership maxim, I chose to do three things for the duration of the experiment. First, I made no suggestions related to changes in corporate worship other than to occasionally add some verbiage in the "welcome" portion of our services that would sound

something like: “All of us have been on mission this week in the places where we live, work and play. And now we have gathered here this morning to celebrate God’s goodness and the great things he has been doing in our lives this week.” Second, when discussing the project among a wider audience in the church, I always appealed to Scripture, framing the experiment as an attempt to follow the Word of God. Finally, I chose Breen’s balanced “European model” of gathering and scattering the Church which includes central Sunday morning events on the church’s campus. I did not attempt to initiate an independent Missional Community or House Church planning movement. In light of the congregation’s code, such a move would have been unnecessarily alienating.

### **Future Development of the Project**

#### Continue Applying the Three-Fold Equipping Model of Leadership

Though the initial results of this project seem to point toward a trajectory of further growth, it is difficult to project whether or not it will continue to develop into a larger movement and reach the organizational “tipping point” that Malcolm Gladwell describes.<sup>14</sup> In order to sustain this project into the future, I and the other stewards of this fledgling initiative will need to continue to apply the three-fold equipping model that I outlined in previous chapters. First, we will need to constantly lay and re-lay the theological foundations for the movement by communicating a vision for a biblical ecclesiology that includes both the scattered and gathered forms of the Church. We can do this by gradually lifting the public profile of the movement among key staff and lay leaders with equipping modules at Session, Diaconate and committee

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14. See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 196-203.

meetings. Dick Wiedenheft's small book, *The Meaning of Missional: A Beginner's Guide to Living Missionally and the Missional Church*, is an excellent resource in this regard.<sup>15</sup>

Second, we will increase the number of Huddles and Missional Communities associated with FPC by continuing to train people in and through the 3DM disciple-making multiplication model. Included in this larger rollout should be a Huddle experience for the church staff. Elements of the 3DM training can be amalgamated into FPC's various lay leadership and officer training processes including the language we use for disciple making.

Third, I will steadily lift awareness for the project by training leaders in the congregation to embody the adaptive principles and skills needed to align the congregation with its own strategy documents. This transformational leadership includes initiating interventions, honoring the DNA of the church and building the vulnerability-based relational trust needed to shepherd people forward in their own leadership and disciple making. Hopefully, with continued equipping, persistent encouragement and God's blessing, this movement that has been initiated can travel further into the center of FPC's ministry culture in order that it may spill out into our community.

### Pursue APEST

As I mentioned in chapter four, APEST language is a new phenomenon at FPC, as it is in most historic mainline congregations. Transfusing this language into the culture of a Reformation-heritage church can be a perilous and difficult exercise, yet it promises to be a fresh and effective lens for understanding gifted leadership in a way that we may not have considered

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15. Dick Wiedenheft, *The Meaning of Missional: A Beginner's Guide to Living Missionally and the Missional Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 2018.

it in the past.<sup>16</sup> The “Discipleship 360 Assessment” survey scores and several of the written responses from the participants in the experiment seem to indicate a real interest in this area. The future exploration and application of APEST in the life of FPC would appear to be a fruitful exercise. I know that understanding my own gift mix (Apostle/Teacher) has helped me tremendously when working together with other colleagues on staff and leaders in the congregation.

### Increase the Degree of Missionality in Our MCs

One of the key indicators of health in an MC is the degree to which its life and purpose are driven by its missionary context rather than by individual and group needs. Unfortunately, when most North American Christians first hear about MC, their frame of reference, if anything, is a small group with an outreach component. The Western Church has done a good job over the years of instilling this understanding. M. Scott Boren finds,

Through the years, small groups have been used to support and reinforce this [attributional/regular attendance] rhythm of church life. Improvement and Adjustment groups have been developed in churches in order to connect people who attend the Sunday services and to help them contribute to the goal of getting more people to attend the Sunday services.<sup>17</sup>

In his book, *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World*, Boren identifies what I call “the Four Levels of Missional Community

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16. Darrell Guder says that “the problem of clericalism that results from that reduction [of ministry to shepherd as teacher]...is certainly one of the major and most daunting challenges that the Western Christian movement faces as it moves out of the protections of established Christendom” (Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* [Atlanta: 100 Movements Publishing, 2017], 3).

17. M. Scott Boren, *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 47.

Engagement.”<sup>18</sup> Even though FPC’s MCs are still in the early stages of this project, most of them are in what I call a “Level 2” tier of engagement, meaning that their meetings are a social priority, but the focus lies on the relationships within the group. Moving from Level 1 to Level 2 is laudable but somewhat easy. Moving to Level 3 is much more difficult and Level 4 can come across as somewhat of a pipedream.

In order for FPC’s missional discipleship multiplication movement to further develop, much more work in its MCs will have to be done for their level of missionality to rise. This will be difficult because staff, lay leaders and covenant partners are not immune to the cultural rhythms around them. Western culture makes Level 4 sound so radically different from the normal rhythms of American lives that it can feel utterly unattainable. Unfortunately, Boren says there are other, even stronger headwinds:

Then if you add to this the fact that the average person in North America watches over twenty-eight hours of television per week, moves every four years, and typically knows more intimate details about people in Hollywood than about their own neighbors, the rhythms of our society revolve around the isolated individualist who is forced to make it on his or her own.<sup>19</sup>

In the face of all these cultural challenges, Boren offers this advice:

To play a different set of life rhythms is not something we learn or do from the pastor’s new vision or because we have a new structure called missional small groups. Instead it is something we learn to do through experiments that add up one after the other to the point that they get deep within us. Then when these experiments take hold new patterns arise and new norms become predominant. These experiments...are developed by people who begin to talk about how God might move through them in missional ways and then begin to risk new experiments of missional life.<sup>20</sup>

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18. See Boren, *Missional Small Groups*, 38-46. For further explanation regarding these Four Levels of Missional Engagement, see Appendix G, “Gauging an MCs Degree of Missionality.”

19. Boren, *Missional Small Groups*, 31.

20. Boren, *Missional Small Groups*, 56. Boren offers a thirteen-step action-reflection process for groups who want to learn missional rhythms (173-179).

Because everyone at FPC, including her pastors, is so steeped in Western cultural lifestyle patterns and in an attractional understanding of ministry, it is my sense that it will take many years for leaders and participants in her MCs to become shaped for missional living.

However, MC is the best place for this shaping to occur. As Tim Keller notes,

The gospel creates community.... Accordingly, the chief way we should disciple people...is through community. Growth in grace, wisdom, and character does not happen primarily in classes and instruction, through large worship gatherings, or even in solitude. Most often, growth happens through deep relationships and in communities where the implications of the gospel are worked out cognitively and worked in practically – in ways no other venue can afford.... Christian community is more than just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternative society. And it is through this alternative society that God shapes us into who and what we are.<sup>21</sup>

### **Informing My Ministry in the Future**

#### **Lead Others to Tackle Tough Challenges**

In my estimation, the ministry issues that I chose to address in this thesis-project are some of the most vexing, adaptive challenges congregations in the West like FPC are currently facing. Among the questions that arise is “How does FPC transition from that of an interest-based to a mission-based organization?” Rather than attempting to answer this question alone, I invited a number of my colleagues to enter into a learning process with me called a “Staff Huddle.” There, guided by a former 3DM consultant, we engaged in a broadly-based attempt to think through and discover some of the competing values and cultural shifts that are necessary for the congregation we serve to face.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 311.

22. “Leadership means influencing the organization to face its problems and to live into its opportunities.’ That second idea – mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges – is what defines the new job of the leader” (William C. Taylor, “The Leader of the Future,” *Fast Company* [June 1999]: accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.fastcompany.com/37229/leader-future>).

As a result of my decision to engage other key staff leaders in this project, multiple areas of ministry within FPC are now simultaneously being influenced, and a broad base of support has been created for the future continuation of the project. As I move forward in my ministry, I will continue to employ this team approach for addressing the adaptive challenges that present themselves to the congregation I serve. Currently, I am leading a Commissioned Lay Pastor Training program at FPC, and in that leadership context I am, once again, taking a select group of high-capacity leaders (in this case ordained Elders and Deacons) through a transformational process of engagement and reflection so that they may lead FPC into a future of increased missional effectiveness.<sup>23</sup>

#### Continue to find Sacagawea

Ministry culture transformation can be a lengthy and arduous journey, and it is easy for leaders to become discouraged by the slow pace of change. Without some element of transformation, historic congregations of all sizes may find themselves in the latter stages of their life cycles where intuitional preservation becomes the focus and motivator for leadership.<sup>24</sup> Such an atmosphere promotes insular thinking. As a result, there may be little energy and creativity for ministry enhancement and thus the transformational process will be invariably more difficult than in a congregation in its adolescent or mature stage.

The consensus among leaders at FPC is that she is in the late, mature stage of her life cycle and in need of some measure of transformation. However, because of her current size and the level of her resources, she can be mesmerized into thinking that all the resources she needs

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23. “Leadership is encouraging a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world” (Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 36).

24. The standard text for understanding the life cycle of a church is Martin F. Saarinen’s small book, *The Life Cycle of a Congregation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1994).

for transformation can be found internally. I believe that this project may have demonstrated this mode of thinking to be untrue.

It is my contention that if there is any long-term success to this project it is because of the coaching and encouragement we received in our Staff Huddle from the former 3DM consultant we engaged to take us through our own Huddle process. Just like Lewis and Clark needed a Sacagawea to complete their journey, so I and the other members of our FPC Staff Huddle needed a voice from outside our ministry culture to guide us through the process of un-learning many of our engrained habits and to disciple us into embodying a new set of scriptural principles related to disciple making and leadership that would sustain us for the transformational path ahead. The consultant created a necessary atmosphere of accountability, and his encouragement to us was invaluable.

At first when I read Breen's adamant plea in *Building a Discipling Culture* for churches to engage one of 3DM's consultants, I cynically considered it somewhat of a marketing strategy for the organization. It is my sense, however, after having completed this project, that because the 3DM approach is so radically different from the traditional Western style of ministry delivery, that a congregation will indeed be severely handicapped if it attempts to implement the 3DM strategy without the guiding hand of an experienced consultant who has already been "off-the-map" and can come back and share what ministry and mission is like on the other side of the mountain range. Unfortunately, smaller congregations without FPC's resources may find it difficult to afford the consulting fees. If that is the case, the 3DM does offer other forms of consulting.<sup>25</sup>

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25. 3DM offers several levels of consulting including training intensives called "Learning Communities." See "Learning Community," 3dm, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.3dmovements.com/l-c>.

Because of my experience with this project, I would contend that every congregation seeking transformation needs some type of “Sacagawea” to lead it forward through the fog of post-Christendom ministry. I know that as I continue to lead at FPC I will continue to pursue consultants, coaches, conferences and other resources that can speak prophetically into the congregation’s life in a manner consistent with the philosophy of ministry and mission I have chosen for this project. Chief among these resources are the various materials produced by Will Mancini’s FutureChurch.co organization, the Exponential Conference events, and the many tools and cohort training opportunities available through 3DM.<sup>26</sup> Other resources might include coaching from the Verge Network, Caesar Kalinowski, Alex Absalom, or one of Alan Hirsch’s organizations.<sup>27</sup>

Though I do not profess to have the background or expertise of any of these individuals and organizations, I do hope that because of this project I am able to share my experience as somewhat of a consultant within my own tribe of churches in the ECO. The vast majority of these congregations still adhere to a traditional Christendom model for mission and may only be inclined to listen to a voice from outside their ministry systems that is close to their own.

## **What I Wish I Could Have Done**

### **Read More Books**

Throughout the duration of this project, there were a number of missional authors and organizational change theorists who produced books that I wish I could have read as a part of my research. Chief among these is Tod Bolsinger’s *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed*

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26. See <https://futurechurch.co>; <https://register.exponential.org/>; [www.3dmovements.com](http://www.3dmovements.com)/.

27. See [www.vergenetwork.org](http://www.vergenetwork.org); [www.caesarkalinowski.com](http://www.caesarkalinowski.com); <https://dandelionresourcing.com>; [www.alanhirsch.org](http://www.alanhirsch.org)

*in the Crucible of Change.*<sup>28</sup> There can be little doubt that resiliency and strength of character are what allows a transformational leader to thrive in the midst of change. Also Rod Dreher's *The Benedictine Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, and Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins' *Missional, Monastic, Mainlines: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions*—though from opposite ideological perspectives, these authors may offer helpful insights to some of the perennial questions surrounding the relationship between Christ and culture in a post-Christendom era.<sup>29</sup> Of course, anything that Alan Hirsch produces is a must read for missional practitioners. His recent *Reframation: Seeing God, People and Mission Through Reenchanted Frames* promises to be a mind-stretching read for those who are interested in the interplay between theology and the arts.<sup>30</sup>

Before engaging this project, I had no idea there had been so much written about missional spirituality and the disciplines related to this area. Because this subject matter was somewhat off-topic for this project, I had little opportunity to read these works. Among those works I hope to read in the future are: David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock's *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, Earl Creps' *Off-Road*

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28. Tod Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Downers Grove, IL: 2020).

29. Rod Dreher, *The Benedictine Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017); Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional. Monastic. Mainline: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

30. Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson, *Reframation: Seeing God, People and Mission through Reenchanted Frames* (Atlanta: 100 Movements Publishing, 2019).

*Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*, and *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out* by Roger Helland and Leonard Hjalmerson.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, and possibly the most exciting book I plan to study, is a gem I found by a local author. Mark C. Powers is the Director of Worship and Music in the office of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and his *Going Full Circle: Worship that Moves us to Discipleship and Missions* purports to integrate missional theology, disciple making, and local music mission.<sup>32</sup> What makes this book so intriguing is that he turns to fellow South Carolinian Reggie McNeal and to Mike Breen for his missional strategy. I plan to work through this book in the future with our music staff here at FPC.

#### Answer More Questions

Though the broad topic I chose for this project – the missional discipleship renewal of traditional, Reformation-heritage churches in North America – has allowed me to come to a significant variety of tentative conclusions related to strategies a pastor may use to bring transformation to the congregation he or she serves, a number of questions still remain that I was not able to explore. First, given the importance that many missional authors give to APEST, I wonder if the traditional Reformed “four offices” of ordination (pastors, elders, deacons, and teachers of the Church) will continue as a workable arrangement for church leadership in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century post-Christendom context. If so, in what way? Second, will Reformed bodies in North America develop a more robust doctrine of the ‘Priesthood of all Believers’ that might recognize

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31. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019); Earl Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006); Roger Helland and Leonard Hjalmerson, *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

32. Mark C. Powers, *Going Full Circle: Worship that Moves us to Discipleship and Missions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

and empower the training of everyday covenant partners for disciple making? Third, will the reductionist Reformation three “Marks of the True Church” continue to be an adequate definition of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, or will they be supplanted by a more organic vision of the Church that prepares her for mission and ministry in a post-Christendom context?

Finally, I have questions about my questions. By this I mean the specific retrospective questions I used for my questionnaire at the conclusion of the experiment. If I had the opportunity to conduct the project again, I would have asked the respondents to reply to some additional questions that are slightly more descriptive. Questions like “When did you start feeling that your attitudes and behaviors related to missional discipleship began to change because of the process?” and “When and why do you feel these changes took permanent hold?” Lastly, I should have also included specific questions related to the participants’ perceived ability to lead others in Missional Community and Huddle.

## Epilogue

I have continued to meet with our MC leaders at FPC beyond the conclusion of this project. Only three of those whom I originally trained have waned in their enthusiasm for leading MCs and two of those are engaged as leaders of traditional community groups. All of them remain convinced that Huddle is an effective strategy for disciple making. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, new participants were embracing MC life at such a rapid pace that I and the others who are stewarding this movement were constantly having to monitor whether FPC had the trained leadership to effectively handle this influx.<sup>33</sup>

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33. Recently, after a few MC leaders and I gave a presentation on incarnational community at a new covenant partner weekend event, a prospective covenant partner came to me afterwards about starting an MC in his upscale retirement community. Excitedly he asked, “How long do I have to muddle before I can Huddle?”

Despite the apparent initial success of this project, larger questions remain regarding the long-term sustainability of this movement within the congregation. Will the momentum created by the innovators and early adopters be enough to push through the resistance of the mid- to late-to never-adopters? Will FPC successfully balance its historic attractional approach with a missional discipleship strategy that significantly penetrates its community with Gospel, or will the centripetal cultural forces within the congregation ultimately prove too much to overcome?

Regardless of how FPC herself eventually answers these questions, it remains clear that the most consequential question in Western Culture with which the Church of Jesus Christ will continue to struggle is whether she can be transformed from a collection of individual religious consumers into a Body of incarnationally-connected, missional producers. How we answer this question may determine if there will be a flourishing Church in North America for subsequent generations or whether we will go the way of Europe and other parts of the Western world.

In this midst of this uncertainty, there is hope not only in the promise that Jesus will build his Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it, but also in the lives of leaders at FPC.<sup>34</sup> At the end of a private meeting I had with two long-time, committee-leading elders, during which I described a general vision for this research project and what it could mean in terms of community impact and ministry culture change at FPC, one of the elders said, “You know I’m old. And I’m not going to change the way I like to do church. But you have my total commitment in helping this to happen.” The other elder caught up with me a little later in the sanctuary, and with tears in his eyes he said in a very low voice, “You know how old I am. Do you think I can see this happen at First Pres before I’m gone?”

The vision, passion and permission-giving of these two Christian men propelled me through the challenges and misunderstandings I faced while leading this project. Other

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34. Matthew 16:18.

unexpected sources of hope kept me going as well. One day, when sharing details about the progress of the experiment with members of FPC's ministry staff, I talked about how many of the missional discipleship principles we had learned were now being embraced and promulgated by the youth department staff. In response to this, one staff person in another department said, "This is great. When our youth leave and move to another city after college, they will seek out a church like FPC." In response, one of the youth leaders who was a part of the Staff Huddle replied, "No, when our youth leave here, they will go and *make* a church like FPC." That is a viral missional discipleship multiplication movement.

## APPENDIX A

### THE DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH AND DYNAMISM OF GREENVILLE, SC

A May 2017 US Census Bureau report named Greenville as the fourth fastest growing city in the United States by percentage of population.<sup>1</sup> Greenville was the only city outside of Texas in the top five. Forbes Magazine featured Greenville as one of “America’s Best Downtowns” and one of the “Best Towns for Young Adults.”<sup>2</sup> Livability.com ranked Greenville as the third best downtown in America.<sup>3</sup>

Two major health care systems in Greenville form a medical hub for the region, and thirteen area colleges and universities make it a desirable location for higher education.<sup>4</sup> Like

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1. “The South Is Home to 10 of the 15 Fastest-Growing Large Cities,” United States Census Bureau, May 25, 2017, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-81-population-estimates-subcounty.html#fastest-growing>. The report notes that Greenville experienced a 5.8% population increase between July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2016.

2. “America’s Best Towns,” *Forbes*, October 14, 2011, accessed April 27, 2018, [www.forbes.com/pictures/efel45eddf/greenville-s-c/#13f576134419](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/efel45eddf/greenville-s-c/#13f576134419). “The 15 Best Cities for Young Adults,” *Forbes*, July 12, 2011, accessed April 27, 2018, [www.forbes.com/pictures/mjh45effk/13-greenville-s-c/#183fa2e03c2b](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mjh45effk/13-greenville-s-c/#183fa2e03c2b).

3. “Top 10 Towns,” Livability, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://livability.com/top-10/downtowns/top-10-downtowns/2016/sc/greenville>. The downtown area features a number of attractions including museums and an extensive choice of about one hundred restaurants. One article notes, “In the past decade or so, downtown Greenville and the surrounding area have become one of the South’s burgeoning dining scenes. In fact, restaurants like Table 301 and Soby’s are credited with helping jump-start the renaissance of the city’s once-sketchy downtown, paving the way for dozens of other delectable restaurants and menu items near and far in the Upstate region of the Palmetto State” (“Southern and Savory: The Best Things to Eat in Greenville, South Carolina,” Food Network, accessed April 27, 2018, [www.foodnetwork.com/restaurants/photos/restaurant-guide-greenville-south-carolina](http://www.foodnetwork.com/restaurants/photos/restaurant-guide-greenville-south-carolina)). Two other prominent features of the downtown area include the Peace Performing Arts Center and Falls Park on the Reedy River which contains a series of riverside gardens, a suspension bridge and waterfall views. These attractions, along with the Greenville Zoo, the Greenville Symphony Orchestra and multiple annual events and festivals on Main Street draw thousands of people of all ages to downtown Greenville every day. Fluor Baseball Field, located on the West End of downtown, is a 6,700-seat baseball-only stadium that hosts the Greenville Drive, a minor league team of the Boston Red Sox.

4. Prisma Health System employs over 15,000 persons in the Upstate including 228 physicians (“Annual Report to the Community,” Prisma Health, accessed, April 27, 2018, <https://www.ghs.org/newsroom/annual-report/>), and the Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital system employs 4,500 people including over 300 physicians (“Offering Good Help to Those in Need,” Bon Secours, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://bonsecours.com/greenville/about-us>).

The largest school in the area is Greenville Technical College which enrolls nearly 11,000 students (“Greenville, SC, Higher Education Facts and City Info,” Study.com, July 17, 2020, accessed March 14, 2021,

many small cities in the American South, much of the history and economy of Greenville is tied to the textile industry. In the early days before railroads, locals used the Reedy River as a convenient way of transporting raw materials and finished goods. As the textile industry grew, a significant number of mill villages blossomed across the western and southern sides of the city. With the closing of almost all of these mills, these blue-collar communities now have become some of the most economically depressed areas of the city with the majority of its residents of either Hispanic or African American descent.<sup>5</sup>

As the textile industry dissolved in the late twentieth century, the region attracted a strong base of business, high-tech, manufacturing and engineering companies.<sup>6</sup> For example, Michelin maintains its North American headquarters in the city, and the nearby city of Greer is the site of

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[https://study.com/articles/Greenville\\_SC\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Facts\\_and\\_City\\_Info.html](https://study.com/articles/Greenville_SC_Higher_Education_Facts_and_City_Info.html)). Among the degrees this 2-year public school offers are programs in engineering technology, health and medical technology, automotive mechanics and computer programming. Bob Jones University, a Christian 4-year liberal arts institution, offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs through five colleges and schools and the Seminary and Graduate School of Religion (“Greenville, SC, Higher Education Facts and City Info.”). The Bob Jones University Art Gallery and Museum is noted for having the second largest collection of sacred art in the world – second only to the Vatican (“Exploring the Museum & Gallery at Bob Jones University,” GVL Today, December 17, 2020, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://gvltoday.6amcity.com/museum-and-gallery-at-bob-jones-university-greenville-sc/>). North Greenville University, another Christian 4-year liberal arts school, is located about 15 miles away in Tigerville, SC and enrolls around 2,500 students. Furman University is a private 4-year university that offers bachelors and graduate degrees to about 3,000 students (“Greenville, SC, Higher Education Facts and City Info”). It is ranked as the best private university in South Carolina (“2021 Top Private Universities in South Carolina,” Niche.com, accessed March 14, 2021, [www.niche.com/colleges/search/top-private-universities/s/south-carolina](http://www.niche.com/colleges/search/top-private-universities/s/south-carolina)), and the 44th best liberal arts college in America (“2021 Best Liberal Arts Colleges in America,” Niche.com, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://www.niche.com/colleges/search/best-liberal-arts-colleges/?page=2>). Graduate schools in Greenville include the Clemson MBA program located on Main Street, the Clemson International Center for Automotive Research, and the University of South Carolina Medical School located on the main campus of Prisma Health Care.

5. A few of the textile mills closest to downtown Greenville have been converted into high-end condominiums.

FPC’s racial demographics do not mirror that of the surrounding population. Its membership is 95% Caucasian, 1% Black/African American, 1% Asian, 1% Latino and 2% other. Of a reported population of 506,837 in 2017, Greenville County is 68.9% Caucasian; 18.6% Black/African American; 9.0% Latino; and 3.5% other (“Quick Facts Greenville County, South Carolina,” United States Census Bureau, accessed April 28, 2018, [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/greenvillevscountysouthcarolina/PST045216](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/greenvillevscountysouthcarolina/PST045216)). Again, most of these minority populations live to the west and south of downtown Greenville.

6. Among these companies are Lockheed Martin Aircraft, 3M, Honeywell and Hubbell Lighting.

BMW's first American manufacturing plant.<sup>7</sup>

Greenville's economy ranks stronger in several areas compared to the rest of the country.

As of early spring 2017, unemployment was 4.50% compared to 5.20% for the United States as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Recent job growth stands at 2.82% compared to 1.59% for the rest of the country, and future job growth is projected as 41.15% versus 37.98%.<sup>9</sup>

The housing market offers an attractive draw for new residents.<sup>10</sup> The downtown area features numerous new high-end condos, lofts, apartments and homes.<sup>11</sup> Home prices in the region have risen in recent years, but not at the same level as the rest of the country.<sup>12</sup>

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7. "Welcome to BMW Group Plant Spartanburg," BMW Group Spartanburg, accessed April 28, 2018, [www.bmwusfactory.com/manufacturing/production-overview](http://www.bmwusfactory.com/manufacturing/production-overview). BMW Manufacturing employs more than 10,000 people on a 6 million square-foot campus to produce all the X3 and X5 Sports Activity Vehicles and the X4 and X6 Sports Activity Coupes in the world. The plant manufactures around 1,400 vehicles per day and is supplied by around forty parts manufacturers in the region.

8. "Economy in Greenville, South Carolina," Bestplaces.com, accessed April 28, 2018, [www.bestplaces.net/economy/city/south\\_carolina/greenville](http://www.bestplaces.net/economy/city/south_carolina/greenville).

9. "Economy in Greenville, South Carolina."

10. In September 2017, Realtor.com announced Greenville as one of "The 5 Best Outdoorsy Cities Where You Can Actually Afford to Live" (Max Rosett, "Move Over, Boulder: 10 Cities Where Outdoor Lovers Can Actually Afford to Live," Realtor.com, July 24, 2017, accessed March 14, 2021, [www.realtor.com/news/trends/10-best-affordable-outdoorsy-cities](http://www.realtor.com/news/trends/10-best-affordable-outdoorsy-cities)). Their criteria included the number of national parks within a four-hour driving distance, a median home value of under \$300,000, the number of restaurants with outdoor seating, annual months of mild weather and bicycle-friendliness. North of the city, multi-use trails wind around lakes and hills in Paris Mountain State Park, and the Swamp Rabbit Trail is a 22-mile multi-use greenway that traverses along the Reedy River in downtown Greenville and along an old railroad corridor, as well as through city parks to connect Greenville with the town of Travelers Rest.

11. Than Merrill, "Greenville Real Estate Market," FortuneBuilders.com, accessed April 28, 2018, [www.fortunebuilders.com/greenville-real-estate-and-market-trends](http://www.fortunebuilders.com/greenville-real-estate-and-market-trends).

12. "Greenville has appreciated at about half the rate of the national average. Over the past three years, Greenville saw appreciation rates reach 13.9 percent, but the national average was 28 percent. So while prices are still up in the area, growth is beginning to slow. The current median home price is around \$169,800 – more than \$45,000 shy of the national average" (Merrill, "Greenville Real Estate Market").

## APPENDIX B

### 2018 FPC STAFF REORGANIZATIONAL REPORT

#### **Excerpts from *Report To The Strategic Planning Committee:* *Staff Reorganization At First Presbyterian Church*** **March 20, 2018**

(This report was drafted by executive pastor Dr. Shelton Sanford, approved by the Session at its Stated Meeting on February 26, 2018, and then forwarded to the Strategic Planning Committee)

#### **Purpose of the Report**

Inform the session of leadership's efforts to address the following concerns:

1. Now that we are in the implementation phase of our strategic vision, we see the need to ensure that the leadership structures of our church are in proper alignment with the vision. Our desire is to evaluate and ensure paid and volunteer staff are organized in a manner which optimizes alignment with the strategic vision.
2. FPC has membership turnover which we believe is due to a lack of integration into the community life of the church. Therefore, we realize that strategies need to be developed to insure that FPC becomes a secure spiritual home for our members where they are effectively assimilated into the life of the church and are being equipped for ministry and service in our church and throughout our community and the world....

#### **Evaluation of Staff Alignment with Strategic Vision**

##### ***Cultivate/Impact***

The strategic vision emphasizes the essential connection between Cultivate and Impact. Discipleship involves both areas. Therefore these two focus areas of the strategic vision must be considered as one unit. Creating a secure home that is missional focused will require consistent effort on the part of the staff and leadership of the church.

##### ***Secure Home with a Missional Focus***

FPC continues to lose a significant number of people out our back door. Creating a community infrastructure that both assimilates and keeps new people connected in a meaningful way to our church is essential. The cultivate area of our strategic vision is the most difficult challenge we face. We must create a secure home where people have a sense of belonging, are being cared for and spiritually nurtured and are being equipped in discipleship. We must develop Life Communities in which our members are able to work out the implications of the Gospel cognitively and practically within networks of relationships. It is our desire for "members of FPC to be transformed by the power of God and be conformed to the image of His Son" (*FPC Strategic Vision Plan Playbook*, p. 8).

We have identified three culture changes that need to be made in the cultivate area of our strategic vision:

1. Transition from Education to Transformation
2. Transition from Sunday School to Life Communities
3. Transition from Small Groups to Discipleship/Mission

We have also identified three culture changes that need to take place in the impact area of the strategic vision:

1. Move from Event Driven to Lifestyle
2. Move from Attractional to Missional
3. Move from Passive to Influencing

Strategies must be developed to ensure that progress is being made in each of these culture changes.

Our strategic vision and the direction our church is heading require that we have highly effective staff in the right positions. Each member of the senior team needs to be specifically gifted and qualified to develop creative approaches in the areas in which he or she has been assigned to serve in leadership. These team members must be knowledgeable in the specific ministry areas, creative with new ideas and strategies, capable of equipping members and lay leaders and highly motivated and capable to bring about change – in particular, culture changes in each ministry focus area. These change agents must be highly relational, clearly focused and unusually creative.

Goals for our current organization of staff:

1. Become more efficient with less personnel
2. Ensure all personnel are effective and essential in their roles...

In seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of each staff member in his or her ministry area, the Senior Pastor, Executive Director, Director of Finance and Operations, and a team appointed from the Staff Committee (Mark Clary, Erin Lauderdale, and Bobby Hoffman) interviewed each member of the Senior Team in order to determine their current duties and how these duties align with the strategic vision.

## **Recommendations**

Following all staff interviews, we would suggest the following recommendations:

- Charge a team of Pastors (Brian Stewart as lead, partnered by Claire Ripley and Tim Leslie) to address and develop the Cultivate and Impact areas of the strategic vision...

## APPENDIX C

### THE IRREDUCIBLE SPIRITUAL DNA OF BELIEVERS, MC'S AND THE CHURCH

Throughout this thesis-project, I will make reference to the “irreducible spiritual DNA” that many missional authors say is characteristic of believers, missional communities and the Church as whole. Just as DNA contains the cellular blueprint for an organism to develop, survive and reproduce so too Christian spiritual DNA provides the same. Missional church authors claim that the DNA of all believers, MCs and the Body of Christ is based upon the life of Jesus, himself. The Gospels demonstrate that Jesus attended to three primary relationships in his life. In Breen’s language, these are “UP” with his Father, “IN” with his disciples, and “OUT” into the world on missional purpose. Jesus called his followers to share and integrate this same set of priorities into their own lives, and so it is of no surprise that his Church would be shaped by his example.<sup>1</sup> One can easily see this three-fold pattern of activity manifest in the life of the early Church described in Acts 2:42-27:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [UP] and to fellowship [IN], to the breaking of bread [IN] and to prayer [UP]. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles [OUT]. All the believers were together and had everything in common [IN]. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need [OUT]. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts [UP]. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts [IN], praising God [UP] and enjoying the favor of all the people [OUT]. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved [OUT] (Acts 2:42-47).

There is an interesting unanimity among many missional church authors in the way they describe this core DNA. Though their language differs slightly,<sup>2</sup> the ideas behind their descriptions seem remarkably similar and patterned after Acts 2:42-47:

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1. Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 51.

2. In 2010, leaders of the Verge Network, an online missional church leadership resource, asked a variety of prominent missional authors and practitioners to address the question, “What is a Missional Community?” In their

<i>Acts 2:42-47</i>	<i>Devoted to God</i>	<i>Devoted to one another</i>	<i>Devoted to the world</i>
Mike Breen <sup>3</sup>	UP: with the Father	IN: with other believers	OUT: into the world
Neil Cole <sup>4</sup>	Divine Truth: the presence of Jesus and His Word	Nurturing Relationships: the many “one anothers” found in the NT	Apostolic Mission: the being sent ones, individually and as a community
Felicity Dale <sup>5</sup>	Centered on Jesus	Sharing life together	Reaching out
Todd Engstrom <sup>6</sup>	In obedience to the Holy Spirit	A Community of Christ followers	On mission with God to a pocket of people
Alan Hirsch <sup>7</sup>	Jesus is Lord	Communitas	Apostolic Environment
Tim Keller <sup>8</sup>	Connecting people to God	Connecting people to one another	Connecting people to the city/culture
J.R. Woodward <sup>9</sup>	Connect with God	Do life together	Partner with God in our neighborhoods and in the world

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responses to that question, all of them expressed their understanding of the irreducible DNA of an MC and by implication the spiritual DNA of believers and the universal Body of Christ. This forum provides a very helpful resource for comparing and contrasting the thoughts of these writers. The Verge Network was launched as an online resource by leaders at The Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, TX in order to extend the training it offered during its Verge Conferences (“About Us,” Verge, accessed March 14, 2021, [www.vergenetwork.org/about](http://www.vergenetwork.org/about)).

3. Mike Breen, “Mike Breen: What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, December 31, 2010, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable). See also, Breen and Breen, *Family on Mission*, 50-51.

4. Neil Cole, “Neil Cole: What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, December 29, 2010, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/29/neil-cole-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/29/neil-cole-what-is-a-missional-community-printable).

5. Felicity Dale, “Felicity Dale: What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, January 2, 2011, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/02/felicity-dale-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/02/felicity-dale-what-is-a-missional-community-printable).

6. Tod Engstrom, “What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, November 13, 2014, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2014/11/13/what-is-a-missional-community). See also, Todd Engstrom, “What Makes a Missional Community?” The Gospel Coalition, June 5, 2013, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-makes-a-missional-community-different](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-makes-a-missional-community-different).

7. Alan Hirsch, “Alan Hirsch: What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, January 1, 2011, accessed May 1, 2018. [www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/01/alan-hirsch-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/01/alan-hirsch-what-is-a-missional-community-printable). These are three of what Hirsch calls the “mDNA of the Church.” The others are disciple-making, the missional-incarnational impulse and organic systems. See Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 24-25.

8. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 293.

9. J. R. Woodward, “JR Woodward: What is a Missional Community?”, Verge Network, January 3, 2011, accessed May 3, 2018, [www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/03/jr-woodward-what-is-a-missional-community-printable](http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/03/jr-woodward-what-is-a-missional-community-printable).

Missional authors seem to agree that if any one of these three irreducible dynamics is missing from a believer's life, a missional community, or a congregation, the genetic code of that entity will be spiritually deformed. For example, if "apostolic mission" is missing from the life of a missional community, then it should be termed something else like a "small group" or "community group." The absence of any of these genetic traits in the life of a MC will inevitably lead to its stagnation or collapse, or at least to a malformed witness to the Gospel.

## APPENDIX D

### PROJECT TIMELINE

#### **Meetings to Secure Permission for the Project (2016)**

- June 6 Senior Pastor gives permission to initiate the project
- June 8 Executive Director and Associate Pastor for Congregational Care give permission to initiate the project
- July 3 Diaconate leadership gives initial permission to engage Deacons in the project
- July 6 Adult Education Committee gives permission for funding
- July 19 Missional Ministry and Evangelism Committee gives permission for project
- July 25 Missional Ministry and Evangelism Committee report received by Session

#### **Informational Meeting with Potential Project Participants (2016)**

- August 2

#### **90 Minute Staff Huddle Internet Coaching Calls with Coach (2016-2017)**

- August 4, 11, 18, 25
- September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
- October 6, 13, 20, 27
- November 3, 10
- December 8, 15, 22
- January 5, 12, 17, 19
- February 9, 16, 23
- March 2, 9, 23, 30
- April 6
- May 11
- July 27
- August 3, 10, 17, 24, 31
- September 7, 14, 21
- October 5, 12, 19
- November 14, 19
- December 5, 19

#### **60 Minute Strategy Calls Between Researcher and Coach (2016-2017)**

- August 3, 15, 30
- September 13, 28
- October 25
- November 8, 13
- December 6, 20
- January 3, 31
- February 2, 14
- March 14, 28

- April 11
- May 2
- August 1, 15
- September 5, 12, 26
- October 24
- November 30
- December 14

### **Onsite Visit by Coach for Three Hour Training Meeting (2016-2017)**

- November 10-11
- March 3-4

### **PHASE I of the Experiment**

#### **90 Minute Meetings with Wednesday/Thursday Huddle Groups led by Researcher (2016-2017)**

- October 5, 6 (Introduction)
- November 2, 3 (Learning Circle)
- November 9, 10 (Learning Circle)
- November 30, December 1 (Learning Circle)
- December 7, 8 (Invitation/Challenge Matrix)
- January 4, 5 (Invitation/Challenge Matrix)
- January 11, 12 (Covenant and Kingdom)
- January 18, 19 (Covenant and Kingdom)
- February 1, 2 (Covenant and Kingdom)
- February 8, 9 (Information/Imitation/Innovation Triangle)
- February 15, 16 (Information/Imitation/Innovation Triangle)
- February 22, 23 (UP/IN/OUT Triangle)
- March 1, 2 (UP/IN/OUT Triangle)
- March 8, 9 (UP/IN/OUT Triangle)
- March 22, 23 (Rhythm of Life Pendulum)
- April 5, 6 (Rhythm of Life Pendulum)
- April 19, 20 (Rhythm of Life Pendulum)

### **PHASE II of the Experiment**

#### **MC Leader Training (2017)**

- May 3, 4 Leading a Family on Mission
- May 10, 11 Serving as a Spiritual Parent
- May 17, 18 Establishing Predictable Patterns
- May 24, 25 Finding Missional Purpose

#### **Resumption of Huddle Training (2017)**

- September 6, 7 (Leadership Square)
- September 13, 14 (Leadership Square)
- September 20, 21 (Leadership Square)

- September 27, 28 (Lord's Prayer Prism)
- October 4, 5 (Lord's Prayer Prism)
- October 11, 12 (Lord's Prayer Prism)
- October 18, 19 (Person of Peace Strategy)
- October 25, 26 (Person of Peace Strategy)
- November 1, 2 (Person of Peace Strategy)

**General Presentations by the Researcher about the 3DM Method of Disciple-making to Various Groups within the Church (2016-2017)**

**Senior Staff Leadership Team**

- October 25
- November 8
- June 8
- July 16

**Adult Sunday School Classes/Staff Retreat at The Cove**

- October 9
- November 27
- December 4, 11, 18
- March 19
- June 25

## APPENDIX E

### CULTIVATE / IMPACT TEAM REPORT, APRIL 2018

(This was my first report to FPC's Session Strategic Planning Committee. It describes our team's response to the challenges and recommendations found in Dr. Sanford's *Staff Reorganization Report*).

#### **BACKGROUND:** From the March 2018 FPC *Staff Reorganization Report*:

“...strategies need to be developed to ensure that FPC becomes a secure spiritual home for our members where they are effectively assimilated into the life of the church and are being equipped for ministry and service in our church and throughout our community and the world.”

“Creating a community infrastructure that both assimilates and keeps new people connected in a meaningful way to our church is essential....We must create a secure home where people have a sense of belonging, are being cared for, are being spiritually nurtured, and are being equipped for discipleship. We must develop Life Communities in which our members are able to work out the implications of the Gospel cognitively and practically within networks of relationships” (emphasis ours).

**INTRODUCTION:** For the last 18 months, some of the pastors have been working on introducing a model of ministry at FPC that engages both the IMPACT and CULTIVATE areas of our Strategic Vision Plan. Recently, our work has been formalized as the “Cultivate/Impact Team” by the Staff Committee and the Session. Some of our assumptions as a team have been these:

- IMPACT (mission) and CULTIVATE (discipleship) are intimately related. In fact, separating the two, which is traditionally done in “program” style churches, diminishes both. Jesus and Paul integrated both in a way that demonstrates that discipleship is best done while on mission and mission is integral to discipleship.

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).*

- Both discipleship and mission are best done in community rather than as individuals in isolation or in a classroom.

“The gospel creates community...Accordingly, the chief way we should disciple people...is through community. Growth in grace, wisdom, and character does not happen primarily in classes and instruction, through large worship gatherings, or even in solitude. Most often, growth happens through deep relationships and in communities where the implications of the gospel are worked out cognitively and worked in practically – in ways no other venue can afford...Christian community is more than just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternative society. And it is through this alternative society that God shapes us into who and what we are” (Tim Keller, *Center Church*, 311).

- The key element of a “missional church” is a discipleship movement where lay people equip other lay people to make disciples. This is not a pastor-centered model of ministry. Pastors DO have a key role, however, and that is as equippers and stewards of the DNA of the movement such that it does not turn into another “program.”

*“Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:11-14).

- The two interrelated ministry “vehicles” which we believe can take us to a wholesome and robust missional discipleship culture are: Missional Community (MC) and Huddle. A Missional Community is a group of twenty to fifty people who have united, in the name of Jesus, around a common service and witness to a particular context. Friends, family, neighbors and colleagues are invited to come and be a part of this extended family of relationships. A synonym for MC is “family on mission.” MCs usually meet twice a month or bi-weekly and engage in an organized mission event once a month.

“...many city churches will also find that midsize “parish” or “mezzanine” groups are helpful for creating community. These groups usually have twenty to sixty people who live in a neighborhood, work in the same profession, or share a common passion in the city. They eat together regularly and consider how to reach out and serve the surrounding cultural, vocational, or geographic community” (*Center Church*, 314).

Huddles are groups of 4 to 8 people who receive instruction, encouragement and accountability and are trained as “disciples” and disciple makers in an atmosphere of high commitment by a Huddle Leader. These leaders directly disciple current or future leaders in mission and discipleship in a regular and consistent meeting rhythm (at least every other week). The expectation is that when Huddle participants finish their Huddle training they will then go on as “spiritual parents” to form Missional Communities within which they disciple people in new Huddles. The best Huddles are formed from MC participants.

*“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons”* (Mark 3:13-15).

- These two organized orbs of relationships do not represent the dismantling of Sunday School nor do they preclude or replace church-wide worship gatherings on Sunday mornings.

“...we must make it clear that we are not speaking merely of informal and individual relationships between Christians but also of membership and participation in the institutional church, gathered under its leaders for the preaching of the Word and the administering of the sacraments....(these are) critical and irreplaceable ways that Christian community provides witness, spiritual formation, and communion with God” (*Center Church*, 314-315).

**VISON/MISSION:** Given this background and assumptions, our **VISION** is to see a multiplication movement in the city of Greenville that is fueled by a missional discipleship culture. Our **MISSION** is to see worship on Sunday as a gathering point for 100 scattered and multiplying weekday Missional Communities that are:

- Equipping Leaders
- Reaching our Neighborhoods
- Blessing our Community
- Offering Intergenerational Fellowship
- Caring for One Another
- Making Disciples who Make Disciples in Huddles

**FPC STRATEGIC VISION PLAN:** Our *Strategic Vision Plan* lists a number of “culture changes” the Session has deemed necessary to move us forward in ministry and mission. The most significant question that remains from the *Plan* is exactly how we will move from our existing culture to the one to which God is calling us. The Cultivate/Impact Team does not believe that only doing the same things we have been doing (just better) will move us forward. Instead, we believe that the new ministry vehicles (MC and Huddle) described above represent effective keys to the future. Specifically,

*In relation to CULTIVATE, how do we move our ministry culture from:*

- Education to Transformation?  
Answer: Huddle. The classroom format offers little in terms of accountability and mentoring. Transformation happens best in relationship.
- Sunday School to Life Communities?  
Answer: Introduce Huddle (discipleship) principles into Sunday Schools so that their effectiveness will be maximized.
- Small Groups to Discipleship/Mission?  
Answer: Missional Communities. See below for a description of the typical types of engagement offered in MCs.

*In relation to IMPACT, how do we move from...*

- Event Driven to Lifestyle?  
Answer: Missional Communities. FPC should only undertake mission events and programs that include a planned follow-up giving participants an opportunity to move to a next stage of missional engagement. For example, what if Grains of Grace participants were invited to go on a mission trip to the DR where our food is being sent? An “event” driven church measures effectiveness by attendance. A discipling culture looks at the quality of the disciples it produces (fruit) and its impact in the community.
- Attractional to Missional?  
Answer: Missional Communities. The focus on events that draw people to our campus must be balanced with an equal emphasis on equipping our members to engage their neighborhoods and networks of relationships throughout the week.
- Passive to Influencing?  
Answer: Missional Communities. Passive congregations help people cope with what culture dictates. Influencing churches proactively build Gospel community in order to engage culture.

**AREAS OF FOCUS:** The Cultivate/Impact Team is currently divided into three areas of responsibility. Each of us are responsible for introducing missional discipleship principles into these areas:

- ❖ Tim Leslie – Sunday School/Men’s Ministry/Marriage & Family
- ❖ Claire Ripley – New Members/Women’s Ministry
- ❖ Brian Stewart – High capacity, “early adopters” throughout the church

**MC DEVELOPMENT AT FPC:** Four MCs are currently meeting. Three more will launch in the next few months.

**HUDDLE PARTICIPANTS:** Around 70 FPC staff, officers and members have either been Huddled or are in a Huddle now.

**MISCELLANEOUS:** The Cultivate/Impact Team believes that not only is it necessary to increase the volume of opportunities for connection in community, the quality of our community must be addressed, as well. To this end, adapting the insights of M. Scott Boren in his *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World* (2010), the Team has identified what we call “Four Levels of Missional Community Engagement.” We are using these levels to gauge the depth of relational and missional commitment in our missional communities:

1. Personal Improvement: Participants attend the group when convenient and if and when he or she likes the people, the group leader is competent, and the study material is interesting. It helps them to cope with the lifestyle they have created. The focus lies on personal benefit.
2. Lifestyle Adjustment: The group becomes a social priority. Schedules are adjusted to fit the meeting time and group members care for one another. The group experience is still

laid on top of the typical American lifestyle. The focus lies on the relationships within the group. Most “successful” small groups in America fall into this category.

3. Relational Revision: Instead of the individual at the center, the participant now identifies him or herself in terms of the relationships in the group. The focus is not on the group meetings, but learning and doing life together differently the other days of the week. This connectedness spills out into the neighborhood such that participants are frequently interacting with, praying for and serving the people around them. These groups have a multiplication mindset. This is the classic Missional Community.
4. Missional Re-creation: The neighborhood is at the center. The group is now not simply about meetings and Bible studies but about seeing what God is doing in the neighborhood. Though this type of group can come in many forms, some groups may decide to move into an economically under-resourced area and then get to know the people on the street, inviting them to meals in the participant’s homes. Group participants constantly consider how they might be a blessing to the neighborhood. Thus, the movement of the Gospel becomes spontaneous, unexpected and unpredictable. These groups have a multiplication mindset and represent the highest level of life on mission.

## APPENDIX F

### PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Question #1: What is the most important thing you will take away from your experience in Huddle and your participation/leadership in MC?**

##### *Respondent 1 (male, Deacon)*

I think I have a bit different experience with Huddle and MC than most of the leadership. I was in some challenging times during Huddle and did not give it my full attention...and even during our first foray into leading a new MC. I have since learned (or been reminded) that I can only get out of something what I invest in it...and since I have now dedicated more leadership attention to my MC, things have been going better in it.

##### *Respondent 2 (male, Deacon, elected Elder after experiment)*

The most important thing I have learned through Huddle/MC participation is that our Christian lives should not be separated from our day-to-day living, but should influence every part of it. I was too much of the mindset that my church life was Sunday morning and maybe Wednesday night and that participating in events on these days would fulfill the requirement to “serve God.” This was the way I (and a lot of folks) was raised to do church.

Through the Huddle and MC processes, for myself and as a family our walk with Christ has become much richer than it could ever be from just attending corporate worship. We have friends we gather with regularly for fun and for worship, and they are walking alongside us helping us to grow. We are finding new ways to serve, both in church and in the community. Christ is now at the center of our family’s weekly schedule, but in a very natural and not forced way.

It has been a joy to watch the children in our MCs embrace this new culture. They can’t imagine living any other way and this will certainly influence their Christian lives as adults.

##### *Respondent 3 (female, elected Elder after experiment)*

The most important thing that I have taken away from my experience in Huddle is that to be a disciple of Jesus, and to be a missional church, we have to be making new disciples; always having the lens of authentically walking in the “words, ways, and works of Jesus” so that we can help others to take their next step towards Christ. And being intentional and increasingly balanced in our rhythms of the Up/In/Out LifeShape in our everyday lives.

##### *Respondent 4 (male, Deacon)*

Go and make Disciples. I realize this is a command from Jesus, an imperative statement, but I did not know "HOW" to go and make disciples. My experience in Huddle and MC gives me practical things to do but at the same time leaves room for me to make it my own. Listen to how the Spirit is leading us and give others tools to also go and make disciples.

*Respondent 5 (female)*

Learning and using a common language that we reference, even now, three years later. Learning a way to process significant life events through the Learning Circle LifeShape and seasons of rest and work through the Semi-circle LifeShape. Learning to be a disciple and learning to make disciples.

I continue to learn things weekly about leading an MC and here are MY experiences: finding a balance between discipleship and outreach is hard and getting people excited about an “Out” is even harder. People seem to prefer the intimacy of a smaller group and they have a myriad of reasons why they can’t/won’t host MC in their homes. It requires a long-term, intensive relational commitment and it is a marathon rather than a sprint.

*Respondent 6 (male)*

I came to see how important it is to integrate discipleship into the life and vibrancy of the church and the life and vibrancy of us as individuals. I also came to better understand the principles Jesus taught and the practices he Jesus used.

*Respondent 7 (male, elected Elder after experiment)*

I guess I would say that I now see that God is breaking into my life every day and if I respond to the Holy Spirit, I enjoy amazing views of how God is working to redeem this world. I'm a part of His plan and that's a lot more fun than serving my selfish desires.

There are other ways my life has been impacted:

- (a) I have a closer relationship with my spouse.
- (b) I have “relational capital” with dozens of people now that I can use judiciously for building the Kingdom.
- (c) I enjoy offering hospitality and how it breaks down barriers.
- (d) I care less about financial success and recognize that "security" is an idol.
- (e) I have received exponentially more love than I've shown toward others.
- (f) I discovered I have a base APEST gifting but I have also strengthened some of my other gifts as I have exercised them.

*Respondent 8 (female, Deacon)*

The importance of forming a common language to build community. In particular, building smaller communities who then connect to others in the church body because of what they have in common. Communities are built on commonalities and common language, which is a “tie that binds.”

*Respondent 9 (male)*

The Life Shapes I learned in Huddle have helped me develop a “common language” for understanding and engaging in disciple making. Although not all the Shapes themselves are as much a part of my common language now after 3 years, the Learning Circle, the Up/In/Out Triangle, and the Rhythm of Life of Pendulum are still frequently spoken about in our MC Leadership team meetings and in our MC itself. I have also applied the Leadership Square LifeShape in many areas of my life: I do, you watch; I do, you help; you do, I help; you do, I watch.

*Respondent 10 (male, Deacon)*

I have learned that to hear God's voice in my life and to develop action plans with accountability in response to that voice requires intentionality and active discernment on my part. Discipleship is the central theme to Huddle and the quality of my walk with Christ is truly central to all aspects of my life, e.g. marriage, parenting, leading a MC, etc. My experience in Huddle was key to helping me see this. Huddle and leading a MC has really impacted my understanding of leadership in the church.

*Respondent 11 (male, Deacon)*

The balance in the LifeShape Up/In/Out. I assume most gravitate towards one or two, but rarely all 3. Therefore, we must be intentional about our actions/activities to ensure we are satisfying all 3. My area of improvement was my "IN", and the Lord has helped me grow significantly over the past few years with dedicated, more consistent quiet time. My prior experience was more sporadic, primarily focused on biblical knowledge and less about my relationship with Christ. I still have to intentionally push this discipline but quiet time has become much more of a joy in my walk with the Lord.

*Respondent 12 (female)*

God's work is so much bigger than just me. One of my favorite things in the Huddle process was coming together to meet new folks and hear in an meaningful, personal way how God is at work in the lives of so many. To some degree it has kept me full of hope when at times the church's consumeristic nature can be quite discouraging.

*Respondent 13 (female)*

I think the most important thing I learned from my time with Huddle/MC leadership is the importance of opening up and becoming vulnerable in these situations. In the past, I would usually refrain from participating or hold things back in a group setting just because that is outside my comfort zone. Because of this, I probably missed out on some opportunities for growth. Through the Huddle process, I learned that not only does sharing personal stories and vulnerabilities open yourself up to words of wisdom from a trusted group, but it often times makes others feel comfortable with sharing as well. I am by no means an expert at sharing, or even totally comfortable with doing it all the time, but at least now I see the importance and will more often share than I did before. As we have started our own MC, I feel like this was an important lesson to learn in order to build closer relationships with our MC members. Without open and honest discussion about our struggles and experiences, it is impossible for MC relationships do go any deeper than surface level. As we, the leaders, open up and share the things we are going through, our MC group members usually feel more comfortable with sharing as well. We have just recently incorporated singing into the rhythm of our MC meetings. When we first started we did not have anyone musical to lead the singing so we did not do it. At the suggestion of other groups, we have started pulling up a Youtube video. I was nervous about how this would go or if it would make people too uncomfortable, however, it has gone really well and has been a wonderful addition to our MC time.

## **Question #2: Question B: Knowing what you know now, how could that experience been improved?**

### *Respondent 1 (male, Deacon)*

If I knew now what I knew then, I would likely have applied myself more during the Huddle experience, or put it off until I could give it more attention.

### *Respondent 2 (male, Deacon, elected Elder after experiment)*

I think it is very important for a MC to take on a “formal” mission (“OUT”) as soon as possible. Even if you try one out for a while, decide it doesn’t work for you and then try another, it is important to get started. For too long we found our MC looking for a mission to support but we let the logistical challenges of young kids and a geographically scattered MC prevent us from settling on one. The MC experience is not complete without a mission that everyone is participating in.

Thanks for the amazing work you are doing at FPC Brian. Some pretty fantastic, culture changing, Kingdom growing things are happening.

### *Respondent 3 (female, elected Elder after experiment)*

The one thing that comes to mind that might have improved my Huddle experience would have been for my spouse to have been able to have participated simultaneously (or soon thereafter), as having a common language of discipling is certainly beneficial as a couple on mission. He is heavily involved in discipleship as well, and while we are both getting at the same end-goal, he has a different vocabulary/set of paradigms that he uses fluently.

### *Respondent 4 (male, Deacon)*

Our experience in being Huddled, but not participating in an MC at the same time was less than ideal. While at the time it was necessary, moving forward it seems far more rewarding and insightful to Huddle persons that are orbiting organically already.

### *Respondent 5 (female)*

So much of our experience with Huddle was confirmation of things we had been exposed to previously in YoungLife, however, we both had numerous Ahh-Ha moments even so. We developed some great friendships within Huddle and we miss gathering with those folks. I still struggle with helping others process their “kairos moments” through the Learning Circle LifeShape. I could probably use a refresher course on that.

### *Respondent 6 (male)*

More personal guidance and shepherding similar to that of Jesus. Including additional and continual accountability.

### *Respondent 7 (male, elected Elder after experiment)*

Shorten Huddle. The 30 weeks is too long. There are too many shapes. Be more proactive with helping people select an OUT before forming an MC. Spend more time on APEST and less time on other content that less academic people find impractical. Keep Huddle and MCs in front of

senior ministry staff constantly and spend less energy on the dozens of people who just want to sit in on another class.

*Respondent 8 (female, Deacon)*

At the beginning of the process, there should have been more clarity related to the purpose of our time together. At the beginning, I thought we were being asked to critically assess if MC/Huddle was an appropriate model for our church. I also think we need to continue to create more structure, consistency, and clarity around what an MC is as we start to point people toward them.

*Respondent 9 (male)*

There is not much about my experience in Huddle and MC Leadership that I think needs improvement. It still remains a very memorable experience to me because it was such a great way of putting discipleship into practical terms within a doable context. My only regret is that I wish I had been exposed to the specific principles we learned in Huddle/MC Leader training earlier in my personal walk with the Savior.

*Respondent 10 (male, Deacon)*

I think we may need to put more focus on the fact that the Huddle process should not be treated as a short-term experience. It takes time, practice, and deep reflection in order for long-term change to take effect in the way we think, behave and lead. I initially approached Huddle as a quick course that I would exit with all the tools I needed, but after going through it, I realize how it continues to impact all of my life in a much more foundational way.

*Respondent 11 (male, Deacon)*

Our huddle process went well over a year (probably closer to 18 months). This time frame needs to be drastically reduced, along with combining some virtual meetings via zoom, skype, or teams. More defined meeting-by-meeting structure would probably help with streamlining the process.

*Respondent 12 (female)*

I think from the beginning there should have been female representation in the ‘coaching’ calls. I would make spiritual disciplines a much larger focus and integrate them more into discussions around the LifeShapes. I also think the APEST information was not given due diligence. It’s a place I believe the movement toward Huddle and MC has floundered or struggled at times. I also see that problem paralleled in our church at large and think it is a place leaders need to continue to improve. More regular meetings with MC Leaders is a must and more retreat type activities to keep the learning fresh and support present. I would also add more hands on leadership to MC for finding places they can serve. I have heard a lot of paralysis in this area.

*Respondent 13 (female)*

If there was any way to shorten the Huddle process I think that would be an improvement. I know it would probably be difficult to trim it down, but I feel like the time commitment does deter some people, and if it were shorter it would be more appealing.

## APPENDIX G

### GAUGING AN MC'S DEGREE OF MISSIONALITY

I use the term “missionality” to describe the degree to which an MC allows its missionary context to drive the internal life of its group. This is a key indicator of an MCs health and is the major element that distinguishes an MC from a small group or community group. Adapting some of the insights contained in M. Scott Boren’s work in *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010, 38-46), I have identified what I call the “the Four Levels of Missional Community Engagement”:

1. Personal Improvement: Participants attend the group when convenient and if and when he or she likes the people, the group leader is competent, and the study material is interesting. It helps them to cope with the lifestyle he or she has created. The focus lies on personal benefit.
2. Lifestyle Adjustment: The group becomes a social priority. Schedules are adjusted to fit the meeting time and group members care for one another. The group experience is still laid on top of the typical American lifestyle. The focus lies on the relationships within the group.
3. Relational Revision: Instead of the individual at the center, the participant now identifies him or herself in terms of the relationships in the group. The focus is not on the group meetings, but on learning and doing life together differently the other days of the week. This connectedness spills out into the neighborhood such that participants are frequently interacting with, praying for and serving the people around them. These groups have a multiplication mindset.
4. Missional Re-creation: The neighborhood is at the center. The group is now not simply about meetings and Bible studies but about seeing what God is doing in the neighborhood. Though this type of group can come in many forms, some groups may decide to move into an economically under-resourced area and then get to know the people on the street, inviting them to meals in the participant’s homes. Group participants constantly consider how they might be a blessing to the neighborhood. Thus, the movement of the Gospel becomes spontaneous, unexpected and unpredictable. These groups have a multiplication mindset and represent the highest level of life on mission.

Level one typifies an immature small group dynamic – one with which most attractional churches would be dissatisfied. Level two characterizes an internal group life for which most “successful” small groups in North America strive. However, such a group cannot be categorized as a MC because it lacks any missional dimension. Level three represents a picture of what most Western, suburban MCs might look like. The driving force of the group is its internal relationships, yet that internal life does spills out into missional engagement. Level three MCs struggle to maintain a clear outward focus in the midst of their very rich and satisfying internal group lives.

Level four exemplifies the highest level of an extended family on mission – one in which the ministry context of the MC truly drives its internal life. Jeff Vanderstelt provides a definition of MC that makes this missional calling clear:

...a missional community is a group of believers who live and experience life together like a family...(they are) made up of Spirit-led and filled people *who radically reorient their lives together for the mission* (emph. mine) of making disciples of a particular people and place where there is a gospel gap....<sup>1</sup>

Engaging God in the neighborhood is the agenda of a Level Four group. This degree of missionality is challenging for most North American Christians as it calls into question many of the consumeristic and individualistic lifestyle choices they are conditioned to make. Many times Western Christians will hear stories about believers selling their homes and moving their families into a new ministry context and about missional Christians who have allowed the life of their neighborhoods to become the driving agenda of their own lives, but these stories seem more heroic than normal.

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1. Jeff Vanderstelt, “What is a Missional Community?” Desiring God, August 10, 2011, accessed May 4, 2018. [www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-a-missional-community](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-a-missional-community).

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## VITA

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